



# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

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started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

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### EDITORIAL OFFICE

Prabuddha Bharata  
Advaita Ashrama  
PO Mayavati, Via Lohaghat  
Dt Champawat · 262 524  
Uttaranchal, India  
E-mail: [awakened@rediffmail.com](mailto:awakened@rediffmail.com)

### PUBLICATION OFFICE

Advaita Ashrama  
5 Dehi Entally Road  
Kolkata · 700 014  
Phs: 91 · 33 · 2244 0898 / 2245 2383 /  
2245 0050 / 2216 4000  
E-mail: [mail@advaitaashrama.org](mailto:mail@advaitaashrama.org)

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# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

Vol. 111

NOVEMBER 2006

No. 11

## Traditional Wisdom

JYOTIĒ: LIGHT

AtkBgta; rI on; k=Ngu fkbI tu srJ<sup>2</sup>kv; gAōJā; & >  
rJ<sup>^</sup>Ju=wt& mbl m& mflū; t Yfū fū; brC rJ grā; mtAū>>

A steady light, swifter than thought, is stationed among moving beings to show the way to happiness. All the devas, being of like mind and like wisdom, proceed reverently towards the one Intelligence. (Rig Veda, 6.9.5)

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ygbeg; }ū; gñCh<sup>^</sup>Jk ōJrJēt I trCI t aMōKv{& >>

He, shining, caused to shine what shone not; by Law he lighted up the dawns. He moves with steeds yoked by eternal order, making men happy by the (chariot-) nave that finds the sunlight. (6.39.4)

; ōg bAgubntI rēI rJōJtraJōJ; tōF& > mt+dCñEJCsrā; <sup>2a</sup>ttnthbsh& flūJ& >>  
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In the midst of that (narrow space of the heart or sushumna) is the undecaying, all-knowing, omnifaced, great fire, which has flames on every side, which consumes and assimilates food, and which warms the body from the insole to the crown. At the centre of this fire is a flame, the colour of shining gold, subtler than the subtle, dazzling like a flash of lighting amidst dark clouds, slender as the awn of a paddy grain, serving as an illustration for subtlety. Paramatman (the supreme Self) dwells in the middle of that flame. (Although thus limited) It still is Brahma, Shiva, Vishnu, Indra, the Self-luminous, the Immutable, the Supreme. (Mahanarayana Upanishad, 13.9–12)

One who can detach one's mind from material things will see the effulgent light of Brahman and Its presence in everything. (Swami Vijnanananda)

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## ∞ This Month ∞

Light and consciousness are so integral to our existence that we hardly notice, much less try to understand them. And when we do, we are greatly intrigued by the insights they offer. Our focus on this theme begins with Consciousness as Light.

Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago provides a perceptive account of Swami Vivekananda's appreciation of art.

Light is synonymous with life. Not only does it support all organic activity, it also makes perception possible. Further, light is synonymous with meaning and symbolic of the Spirit. The gross, the subtle, and the causal—light pervades all. Prof. Vijaya Kumar Murty, Chair, Department of Mathematical and Computational Sciences, University of Toronto, gives us an illuminating overview of the idea of light in *Lead, Kindly Light*.

The notion of the self, though central to our personality, has always been a matter of debate. Philosophers, psychologists, neurophysiologists, litterateur, and artists have all tried to study and interpret the human self in their own ways, but the self has stoutly resisted any definitive objective characterization. Swami Satyamayanandaji, a monastic member of Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, provides us a glimpse of this absorbing subject in *The Self and the Atman*.

Shiva as Nataraja, the Divine Dancer, has always fascinated thinkers as well as creative artists and writers. *Dancing Shiva and the Self-creating World* uses this imagery to explore the consciousness that underpins the world. Not only do the 'creativity' and 'generosity' of Shiva's gestures hint at the process of evolution of consciousness, they also guide us towards a genuine

realization of our own conscious selves. The author, Dr Beatrice Bruteau, is a member of the Vedanta Centre of Atlanta and an adjunct professor at the Divinity School, Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem.

The spiritual and intuitive dimensions of human intelligence have lately been in focus. But what exactly is the difference between this intelligence and our ordinary intellect; and is a transition to the deeper aspects of intelligence possible? These issues are addressed in *From Intellect to Intelligence: Taking the Quantum Leap* by Dr Sampooran Singh, former Director, Terminal Ballistic Research Laboratory, Chandigarh, and Dr Kanwaljit Kaur, Member, Indian Pharmacological Society.

We also share in this issue the interesting responses from our readers to *The Idea of Light*, the poetic conundrum posed by Hiranyagarbha in our February number.

Dr Sudipta Das, Head, Department of Sociology, Southern University, New Orleans, takes a fresh look at the concept of humanism from the spiritual point of view and shows how genuine lived spirituality is inseparable from humanism at its best. Her article is titled *Religion and Practical Spirituality: Living the Ideal of Highest Humanism*.

Nature provides us constant reminders about its intrinsic order and harmony, and beckons us to a living that is in consonance with it. Nature can also provide hints on spiritual life. Smt. Pritha Lal, Organizational Behaviour Specialist, Nu Skin Enterprises, Provo, tells us about one such insight that we can have from the ways of the penguins in *Karma Yoga at the End of the World*.

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# Consciousness as Light

EDITORIAL

**T**he key concepts that initiated the revolutionary change wrought in our world-view by the theories of relativity pertain to the nature of light: that light, as a signal, is indispensable to any process of observation, that the velocity of light is independent of the motion of its source, and that the speed of light sets a limit to speeds that can be attained in our observable universe.

The fact that all motion is relative may well have been obvious to the ancients. But the fact that space and time are not only interrelated in forming the warp and woof of our observed world, but are themselves subject to change with the speed of the observer and the masses of objects associated with them followed directly from the discovery of the remarkable properties of light. Light, therefore, not only 'lights up' the universe for us, thus making for the most fundamental of our perceptions, it actually determines the very fabric of the observed universe. If light had had a different set of properties, we would have been in a different world.

There are other ways in which light challenges traditional modes of thought. For instance, its dual nature—particulate as well as wave-like—provides strong empirical evidence for the coexistence of opposites. Not only does this call into question the common presuppositions of rational thought, it also reminds us that paradoxes are structured into the very framework of nature.

The initial discovery of the wave-nature of light in the seventeenth century itself caused a minor upheaval in scientific thinking. Light had till then been thought of as particulate; and all waves known at that time were mechanical in nature, depending on a physical medium for propagation. Sound waves were a case in point. It took nearly three centuries of research before

it came to be accepted that light did not require a medium for propagation.

Light and sound are prototypes of electromagnetic and mechanical waves, and in the eye and the ear we have the specialized systems to transduce these waves into vision and hearing. True, we have other sense organs—the chemoreceptors that make for taste and smell, and the mechanoreceptors mediating touch—but it is light and sound that largely shape our perceptual as well as conceptual worlds.

Most of us have a specific preference for either visual or auditory input—some of this is innate and the rest cultivated. We may not even be aware of this preference. This difference may get exaggerated in those with 'photographic' memory, who can see a text but once and remember it, or in the shrutidhara, who have exceptional recollection of whatever they hear. If we are observant we may notice our own preferences—some of us are more comfortable gathering new information from books and visuals while others find it easier to remember lectures or audio recordings. Those given to upasana and meditation may be better aware of their natural orientation: some find visualization of images easy while others prefer to dwell on the mantra as a sound symbol. Either way, we internalize the external world and its vibrating energies to construct our own vision of reality within our consciousness. Both light and consciousness are critical to this construction.

The study of consciousness is a principal concern of Advaita Vedanta. The primacy of consciousness is one of its central tenets. If light determines the way the external world is structured in our consciousness, it is consciousness that imparts reality to this structure. There have always been strong proponents of materialism—from the Indian Charvakas and Greek

materialists to modern neuroscientists—who believe that consciousness can be shown to be a derivative of the physical activity of the brain. But there is no definitive evidence for this to date. The other viable alternative, which has been extensively elucidated in Vedanta, is that consciousness is an entity *sui generis*—the very essence of subjectivity, resistant to any form of objective association. This latter is the reason why it is not amenable to the methods of the objective sciences.

Subjectivity in its most extreme form could take the form of subjective creation or *drishti-srishti-vada*, a view advocated by the Advaitic thinker Mandana Mishra. This view had its counterpart in the Buddhist *Vijnanavada* school which held *vijnana*, consciousness or cognitions, to be the only philosophically tenable reality. As mental images are our sole vision of existence, there is no hard and fast way of separating objective perceptions from imaginative colourings. There is also no definitive independent criterion to prove that our perceptions are not our creations as in a dream (after all, the dream world appears real and 'external' as long as we are dreaming). An extreme form of solipsism would even suggest that this world and its objects (including ourselves) have been dreamt into existence by a 'universal mind'. It is only the high degree of apparent coherence in the external world and the natural distinction of 'internal' and 'external' that our mind and senses make for us that has prevented a large scale espousal of this extreme form of *drishti-srishti-vada*.

A less extreme and more widely accepted Vedantic position views the world as derived from consciousness, though there are divergent opinions on how a non-relational entity like consciousness could give rise to a multipartite, objective universe. The Advaitic theory of *maya* is essentially an acknowledgement of the fact that this generation of the space-time-causality matrix from pure consciousness is resistant to any logical explanation simply because our logical categories are themselves part of this matrix.

Traditional Advaita has been concerned

more with the subjective realization of pure consciousness, our real self, than with the study of the correlates of consciousness in the objective world. Its cosmogony may be shown to have some loose parallels to the currently standard cosmological model (the big bang), but while the latter is derived from observational astronomy and experiments in particle physics, the former is a purely conceptual structure based on the Upanishads.

The Tantras and the school of Kashmir Shaivism have especially dwelt upon the category of cosmic energy (*Shakti*) as an aspect of consciousness, and have elaborated on the various aspects of *Shakti* and their manifestations. The ultimately non-dual category of *Shiva-Shakti* manifests as the various aspects of knowledge, will, emotion, and action as well as the objective physical world, which therefore has also the dual property of energy and consciousness.

Mystics of all times have sensed this inseparability of power and consciousness and have been witness to the consciousness pervading even apparently insentient objects. In the words of Acharya Abhinavagupta: 'It is Shiva Himself, of unimpeded will and pellucid consciousness, who is ever sparkling in my heart. It is His highest *Shakti* Herself that is ever playing on the edge of my senses. The entire world gleams as the wondrous delight of pure I-consciousness. Indeed, I know not what the sound "world" is supposed to refer to.' Sri Ramakrishna once remarked: 'The divine Mother revealed to me in the Kali temple that it was She who had become everything. She showed me that everything was full of Consciousness. The image was Consciousness, the altar was Consciousness, the water-vessels were Consciousness, the door-sill was Consciousness, the marble floor was Consciousness—all was Consciousness.'

Consciousness is therefore as critical to the construction of the universe as is light. It is in understanding consciousness that we are likely to understand the fundamentals of this construction.

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# Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago

November 1906

In the year 1900 [Swami Vivekananda] attended the Paris Exposition in which various figures representing the arts of sculpture and painting were exhibited. The Swami had a copy of the illustrated report of the Exposition and in it he pointed out one particular piece of sculpture. There were two figures, one of a man and the other a woman. The man represents a sculptor, or more properly an artist. His right hand with the necessary tools is placed carelessly on the knee of the woman and with the left hand he unveils her face and is charmed by the beauty exposed to his view. Below the figures is written "Art et Nature." Here the Swami remarked that it would have been better if it were named "Art unveiling Nature." The artist unveils the beauty of nature to the uninitiated gaze. Just as the same human face mirrors different expressions according to the inner feelings of the heart, so the same landscape wears different aspects and reveals different hidden ideas to the artist. To her beloved worshipper, the artist, Nature yields up the treasures of her infinite beauty. The Swami said that the artist catches some of the fleeting graces of coy Nature and gives them permanence. This is the initiative work of an artist. ... Thus the artist must have preconceived a perfect idea of the relation between Art and Nature, and then produced this master-piece. Whoever will thus find out the links of the inner and the outer world, will also be able to give as perfect an expression to them as the above artist; and thus from the outflowing of eternal beauty from the inner to the outer world, the poet, the painter, the sculptor, makes his selections, concretizes and expresses them in the above way for the benefit of humanity. This, the Swami said, is the highest and noblest mission of all artists. ...

In his conversation with Max Muller, Indian architecture was one of the topics. The professor was of opinion that in the Buddhist architecture there was some resemblance to the Greek and, as the Greeks had communication with India at that time, it seemed probable that India was influenced by Greece. The Swami retorted by saying that, if the mere presence of some Greeks in India was the only proof that Indian architecture was indebted to the Greek, the argument might prove the other way and it might with equal force be said that Greek architecture was influenced by Indian. For, the sculptures of the Buddhist period have no resemblance whatever to those of the Greeks. The latter excel in the representation of the external, while Indian sculpture represents the inner nature almost at the sacrifice of the external. The Greek sculptor is very exact in the minutest details of anatomy, while the Indian almost completely overlooks it to express various mental aspects. ...

Here in India the Hindu as well as the Mahommedan architect never fails to give an accurate expression to some idea or other. While travelling in Rajputana, Swamiji was very much struck with the beauty and the perfect expression of a tomb at Alwar. While visiting the Taj at Agra, he remarked, "If you squeeze a bit of these marbles, it will drip drops of Royal Love and its Sorrow. People say Calcutta is a city of palaces, but the houses look much like so many boxes placed one upon the other! They convey no idea whatever. In Rajputana you can still find much pure Hindu architecture. If you look at a Dharmasâlâ, you will feel as if it calls you with open arms to take shelter within and partake of its unqualified hospitality. If you look at a temple, you are sure to find divinity blooming in and about it. If you look about a rural cottage, you will at once be able to comprehend the special meanings of its different portions, and that the whole structure bears evidence to the predominant ideal of the owner thereof. This sort of expressive architecture I have seen elsewhere, only, in Italy." He had also a great admiration for Italian art.

—Priya Nath Sinha



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# Lead, Kindly Light

PROF. VIJAYA KUMAR MURTY

**T**he fabric of our life is woven with threads of light. We are alive because of the sun's light. We can move around and function because of this light. Plants live and synthesize their food by the power of sunlight. We burn ancient sunshine in coal and oil, and we wear sunshine in cotton and wool. We drink sunshine in our orange juice, and we eat sunshine in our vegetables. The entire fabric of our life is indeed woven with threads of light.

There are other sources of light besides the sun, such as the moon, fire, and lamps. However, the moon's light is but the sun's light reflected, and fire and lamps burn fuel which derive their energy from the sun.

## Varieties of Light

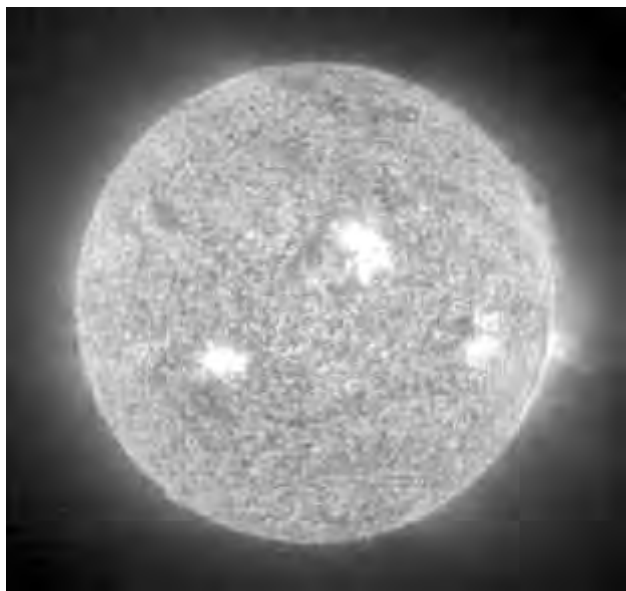
Seeing with the eyes is one kind of vision, and it is mediated by light. We can interpret vision much more broadly. As a preliminary, we

can say that anything that helps us to perceive is a kind of light. Thus, sound and touch are kinds of light. We know how those who do not have the use of their eyes can be trained to guide themselves by sound and touch. The famous author and educator Helen Keller, who was deaf, dumb, and blind, learnt to hear, speak, and see through touch. In her book *Seeing Hands*, she speaks of her hands as light. She saw the world with the help of her hands. Through her hands, she also discovered meaning, and meaning is a kind of light. She describes the moment when she understood the meaning of the word 'water': 'The mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that w-a-t-e-r meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, joy, set it free!'

Meaning is a tremendous form of light. We know how Viktor Frankl held on to his life and sanity during his internment in a Nazi concentration camp by focusing on finding meaning, even in the midst of terrible suffering. He spent the rest of his life talking and writing about the importance of meaning, and even developed a form of therapy, called logotherapy, based on finding meaning in life.

Intelligence is also a kind of light. When we don't know something, we say, 'I am in the dark about it.' When we find someone who is very intelligent, we say, 'That person is brilliant.' When we want someone to explain something to us, we say, 'Can you please throw some light on this subject?' Light is associated with, and is symbolic of, knowledge.

A smile is a kind of light. In his beautiful hymn on Sri Ramakrishna,



Lighting up our lives: the Sun

Swami Premeshananda writes: 'tava hasi rashi kirana barashi; thy delightful smile lights up (even the domain beyond the mind).'

Kindness and generosity are kinds of light. Through kindness and generosity, we give light to others and also to ourselves. We are able to see inside others and we are able to understand and communicate with them. In words of Antoine de Saint-Exupery, from his *Little Prince*: 'It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.'

Hope is a kind of light. When we have nothing else to hang on to, it gives us strength and direction. Faith is also a kind of light. In the Old Testament (Isaiah, 50.10), it is written: 'He who walks in darkness, to whom no light appears, let him trust in the name of Yahweh, let him rely upon his God.'

The name of God, the mantra, is a kind of light. Sri Sarada Devi says that by the repetition of the mantra one learns how to conduct oneself.

If we analyze all of the above varieties of light, we find they can be broadly classified as based on either rational awareness or feeling. In both cases, light makes us aware of something. That is, it makes perception possible. It is remarkable how fundamental light is, not only to our survival, but also to our culture, our language and our thinking.

### Light and Perception

We gave a preliminary definition of light as something that helps us to perceive. But this requires refinement. Suppose we stand in front of a mirror. Certainly, the mirror helps us to see ourselves—but is it light? In fact, if we stand in front of a mirror in the dark, we will not see our reflection. Thus, the mirror by itself does not enable us to see, but acts as an instrument. This forces us to refine our definition of light.

We are used to thinking that at the ordinary level of perception, light is the key factor. However, though we need light to see, external light is not sufficient. Otherwise, there would not be traffic accidents in daylight. Also, people

who witness a crime during the daytime would not have difficulty in giving detailed descriptions of the perpetrators. It is not only light that is needed. The mind has to be present. If we are absent-minded, light will shine but we will not see. There has to be an inner light that is visible to the mind. Ideas, and the understanding they engender, are a kind of light.

### Light and Life

Light and life are inseparable. Swami Vivekananda said, 'We are lamps, and our burning is what we call "life".'<sup>1</sup> We need light to live and to guide ourselves properly through life. Everyone attending a late-night theatre is able to get up and leave the hall at the end of the show without bumping into anything. But it becomes a little more difficult if the hall is in darkness. Similarly, we need light to navigate through life without bumping into things and hurting ourselves.

What gives us light? In general, we try to borrow light from others. We try to find people who will show us the way. We are led by the opinions of others and by public opinion. We behave as we think we ought to behave. We are afraid to be isolated or alone, so we behave in a manner calculated to show that we belong to a group. We conform to what we perceive to be the norm. When this is done on a large scale, it also defines the norm and 'the proper way'. We can all look into our own life and reflect on the extent to which we do this in order to 'fit in'.

Is this wrong? Should we instead rebel and become non-conformists? Even non-conformism is a kind of conformity. Some people want to prove that they are independent and non-conformists. Non-conformism itself becomes a kind of fashion. But if one deviates even a little from the currently fashionable form of non-conformism, one is isolated. Real non-conformism is to think rationally and clearly, and to act based on that thinking. Sometimes our action will be in consonance with the mainstream, and sometimes it will not. If we cannot think in this way, then let us admit that we



dress, eat, and behave as we do because we want to belong to a group.

It is not only in action, but even in thinking that we want to conform. Nationalism sometimes circumscribes the independence of thought even of brilliant scholars, what to speak of the popular media. In contradicting that, one runs the risk of being branded unpatriotic.

Then there is the perennial debate between science and religion, the two high priests. We go to the church of one or the other. Either we are 'believers' and so decry science, or we are 'scientific' and therefore do not accept any religious speculation.

The security we derive from belonging to a group, though, exacts a heavy tax from us. As Plato said, the price that we pay for silence, for not thinking for ourselves, is to be led by fools. And as the Upanishad says, it may very well be like the blind leading the blind, with both ending up in the ditch.<sup>2</sup>

What is the foundation for this? What is behind our desire to belong to a group? Firstly, we do need guidance. It would be the height of arrogance to think that we can do everything by ourselves. Secondly, we are all interdependent. Therefore, we must take into account the views and feelings of everyone. However, neither of these means that we should follow anything without full awareness and full responsibility.

### Sources of Light

If we must be led, then we should seek the guidance of those who have light. The first place to look is within ourselves. Our mind can guide us. If we learn to reflect, we will get light to guide ourselves. The Bhagavadgita (2.49) says, 'buddhau āraṇ am-anviccha; take refuge in your ability to think.' If we can develop the capacity to reflect and think, we will get a lot of light from within ourselves. We will have a mind that is not carried away by fashion or passion and which can see clearly.

Reflection is aided by the power of concentration. Swami Vivekananda says: 'In making money, or in worshipping God, or in doing

anything, the stronger the power of concentration, the better will that thing be done. This is the one call, the one knock, which opens the gates of nature, and lets out floods of light.'<sup>3</sup> He states that the difference between animals and humans, or between one human being and another, is in the power of concentration. It is said that Newton could hold a thought for days until it unravelled itself and revealed new secrets, new light.

But that is not all. There is a subtler light that even the mind cannot see. Rather, this light is what illumines the mind. It cannot be seen by the mind, but it can be felt. This is the light of spirit.

The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad recounts a fascinating conversation between the sages Yajnavalkya and Janaka. King Janaka raises the question: what serves as light for a man when the sun and moon have set, fire has gone out, and speech has stopped? The spirit (self) serves as light, answers Yajnavalkya.<sup>4</sup>

What is spirit? We cannot exactly define it, but we can say what it is not. It is not material, and it is not psychological. Again, in response to Janaka's question 'What is the spirit?' Yajnavalkya responds: 'The self-effulgent light within the heart.'

### Light as a Symbol of Spirit

Light has been a symbol of the spirit in all traditions. We say that a person who has directly experienced spiritual reality is 'illuminated'. The ancient Gayatri mantra is a prayer for our understanding to be illumined. In the Bible (Genesis, 1.1–3), it is recorded that 'In the beginning ... God said, Let there be light: and there was light'. In the Zend Avesta of the Zoroastrians is the prayer 'I beseech thee, O wisdom, for the clear projection of light'.<sup>5</sup> The first hymn of the Rig Veda is an adoration of luminous Agni, the sacrificial fire—the well-wisher of the community.

The Mundaka Upanishad (2.2.9) states: 'Hiraṇ maye pare koṭi virajāṁ brahma nīkalam; tacchubhraṁ jyotiṣāṁ jyotis-tad-yad-ātma-vido

viduë; The stainless, indivisible Brahman shines in the golden innermost sheath. It is all-pure. It is the Light of lights. It is that which they know as the inmost self.<sup>6</sup> The Katha Upanishad says: 'Tasya bhásá sarvam-idaó vibhátí; Through Its radiance, all this shines.'<sup>7</sup> In the Isha Upanishad, there is a prayer offered at the time of death to the being within the sun: 'Hiraī mayena pátreī a satyasyápihitaó mukham; tattvaó péñannapávīī u satyadharmáya díññaye; The face of Truth (Brahman in the solar orb) is concealed by a golden disc. Do thou, O Sun, open it so that I who have been worshipping Truth may behold It.'<sup>8</sup>

Swami Vivekananda, in his 'Hymn of Creation', writes 'Verily, the Sun is He, His the ray, Nay, the Sun is He, and He is the ray.'<sup>9</sup>

In the Gita, when Sanjaya sees the cosmic divine form of Krishna, he exclaims, 'If the light of a thousand suns were to blaze forth all at once in the sky, that might resemble the splendour of that exalted Being.'<sup>10</sup> And Krishna himself says, 'Jyotisám-api taj-jyotis-tamasáë param-ucyate; I am the light of all lights, beyond all darkness' (13.17). Similarly, Christ said, 'I am the light of the world' and 'Ye are the light of the world.'<sup>11</sup> Buddha said, 'The light of truth has illumined my being.' And in our times, Sri Ramakrishna spoke in very clear terms about the luminous nature of spiritual reality. He said:

I had the immediate knowledge of the Light that is Mother. ... It was as if the houses, doors, temples and all other things vanished altogether; as if there was nothing anywhere! And what I saw was

the boundless infinite Conscious Sea of Light! However far and in whatever direction I looked, I found a continuous succession of Effulgent Waves coming forward, raging and storming from all sides with a great speed.<sup>12</sup>

He described his vision as a 'luminous sea of Consciousness'. It is interesting to note that when Sri Ramakrishna had that experience, he was not contemplating light. Rather he was contemplating on the form of the Divine Mother. In other instances also, we find that his visions are associated with light. For example, when he had the vision of Sri Chaitanya, he saw him as a radiant youth.



ADAPTED FROM BISWANJAN CHAKRAVARTY

'I had the immediate knowledge of the Light that is Mother.'

Those that associated with Sri Ramakrishna also had such experiences. Swami Saradananda describes the unusual experience of Hriday, Sri Ramakrishna's nephew:

One night Hriday saw the Master going towards the Panchavati. Thinking that he might require his waterpot and towel, he took them and followed him. As he was going, Hriday ... saw ... that the Panchavati was illumined by the light coming out of [Sri Ramakrishna's] body. ... Taking all this to be an optical illusion, Hriday rubbed his eyes again and again, observed all the surrounding things in their natural state and looked at the Master once more. ... He repeatedly saw the Master in that luminous form. Extremely amazed at it, Hriday ... looked at his own body and saw that he too was an effulgent being made of light.<sup>13</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna himself says, 'The more you advance toward God, the less you will see of His glories and grandeur.'<sup>14</sup> After various visions of names and forms, the aspirant 'sees only Light without any attributes' (853). 'At last he sees the Indivisible Light and merges in It' (354).

Swami Vivekananda says, 'We put our hands over our eyes and weep that it is dark. Take the hands away and there is light; the light exists always for us, the self-effulgent nature of the human soul.'<sup>15</sup>

Though we may not have experienced it directly ourselves, we can be convinced on empir-

ical grounds that spiritual reality is connected to light. The great souls that we have just quoted lived at different times and at different places, yet all testified to the nature of Reality as light. We have no evidence that they were in communication with each other, which adds greater strength to their testimony.

### Principles of Spiritual light

Just as in the field of optics, we can formulate certain laws of light, similarly, from Sri Ramakrishna's words, we can discern four principles about spiritual light: (i) Spiritual reality is light, but not the light that is perceived by the senses. (ii) It is the spiritual light that is manifesting as perceived light. (iii) Spiritual light is reflected in varying intensities. (iv) Spiritual disciplines make us aware of that light. Let us consider each of these in turn.

### Spiritual Light Is Not Material

About spirit, Sri Ramakrishna says, 'It is Light, but not the light that we perceive, not material light.'<sup>16</sup> What makes spiritual light different from perceived light? There are three aspects:

(i) Spiritual light is unchanging, while material light is changing. Because perceived light is changing, it is always accompanied by darkness. Sri Ramakrishna says, 'He who is aware of light is also aware of darkness' (288). All that is perceived is clothed in the dualism of perceiver and perceived. The outer light waxes and wanes. But the inner light is unchanging. This is referred to in the Gita as *kāra* and *akāra*.

(ii) Spiritual light is self-luminous, while perceived light derives its light from some other source. Perceived light is either reflected from another source, or, as in the case of the sun, is generated by consuming fuel. But spiritual light is not generated, nor is it reflected. It is the very nature of Being; it therefore shines of itself: *svayā prakāśate*. Thus, it cannot be perceived in the usual dualistic sense of perceiver and perceived. By what light can



Concealed is the 'Face of Truth'

be known that which is the source of all lights? Sri Ramakrishna gives the parable of the night watchman who goes around the entire premises with a bright light. He can see everyone and everything, but none can see his face. For that, one has to request him to turn the light onto his own face.

(iii) Spiritual light is love itself. Just as the radiance of the sun consists of heat and light, spiritual radiance consists of love and awareness. This light is not an impersonal radiance. There is no condition on this love. Sri Ramakrishna says, 'One man may read the Bhāgavata by the light of a lamp, and another may commit a forgery by that very light; but the lamp is unaffected. The sun sheds its light on the wicked as well as on the virtuous' (102). We may ask why there is good and evil in the world. But these are our classifications. It is like asking the sun why there is darkness. The sun will not understand what you are talking about. For the sun, there is only light. Darkness is the lack of perception of light. Swami Vivekananda says, 'The vibration of light is everywhere'.<sup>17</sup>

### Spiritual Light Manifests as Perceived Light

It is this same spiritual light that is manifesting as perceived light, even though it cannot be perceived with the eyes. Sri Ramakrishna says, '[God] is the Sun of Knowledge. One single ray of His has illumined the world with the light of knowledge. That is how we are able to see one another and acquire varied knowledge'.<sup>18</sup> We have already stated that all perceived light is borrowed: either by reflection or by consumption of fuel. If all perceived light is borrowed, there has to be an ultimate source. The light of Spirit is the light of all lights—*jyotiḥām-āpi taj-jyotiḥ*. So, by what light can it

From whom all gloom and darkness have dispersed;

That radiant Light, white, beautiful

As bloom of lotus white is beautiful;

Whose laughter loud sheds knowledge luminous;

Who, by undivided meditation,

Is realised in the self-controlled heart:

May that Lordly Swan of the limpid lake

Of my mind, guard me, prostrate before Him!

—Swami Vivekananda

be illumined? Though it cannot be perceived, it can be felt. We can see its reflection, as it were. This is what Christ meant when he said 'No one comes to the Father except through me.' It can be glimpsed through revelation. All revelations are partial; and yet each is a pointer to the Real. That is why Sri Ramakrishna could say 'as many revelations

[faiths], so many paths; *jato mat tato path*.'

(To be concluded)

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# The Self and the Atman

SWAMI SATYAMAYANANDA

Explain to me the Brahman that is immediate and direct—the self that is within all.<sup>1</sup>

Few would not have come across the sad sight of a mentally handicapped person trying to make sense of the world around him or her. The indecipherable gibberish, erratic gestures, unfocussed eyes, and unkempt look tell their own story. We are apt to pass such people by as unfortunate victims of nature, but they may also challenge our notions of personality and self. In fact, it is precisely for this reason that mental illnesses have always been associated with superstition, taboo, and black magic. Exorcists, faith healers, and shamans have been offering prayers, muttering sacred chants, sprinkling holy water, and resorting to whipping and other forms of torture to exorcise the spirits that radically transform the personality of the afflicted. Humanity, from the rustic to the fanatical, is still not rid of such beliefs, though today, we are apt to look at all these 'doctors' as misguided, and get mental illness treated with medicines, therapy, and support.

The attitudinal change toward mental illness is the result of spectacular advances in neurochemistry, neuropsychiatry, and related

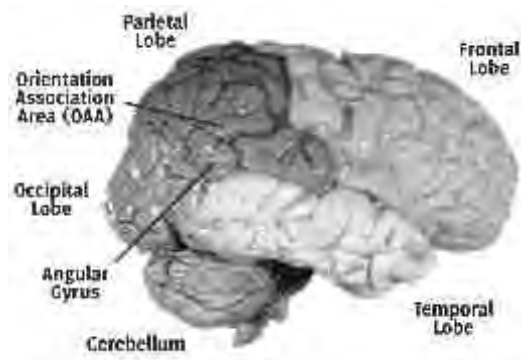
disciplines, facilitated by sophisticated scanning techniques and bioassays. But it would be incorrect to say that the old methods to cure the mentally challenged were totally wrong. They had their measure of success. More importantly, they were based on conceptions of the self prevalent in those communities as much as ours are on currently prevalent notions.

Neurology, psychology, and psychiatry are closely allied in their study of normal and abnormal minds. Genetic researchers trying to understand brain function at the deeper molecular level have also joined this study. Ironically, some of these studies have revealed a large grey area between normal and abnormal function in which many people live without even being aware of it. More alarmingly, today's society, moulded on science and technology, is giving rise to greater stress, depression, tension, loneliness, and boredom. This is actually acting like a catalyst for seemingly virulent mental illnesses.

Modern neuropsychiatric research has still a long way to go. Answers to all the big questions in science and contemporary philosophy depend upon a coherent explanation of the body-brain-mind architecture. It is superfluous to add that it is the notion of the self that makes everything coherent to us. Even as human knowledge widens, we are often forced to look beyond scientific parameters in trying to understand the nature of the self. It is here that Eastern cultures have been providing fresh leads through their age-old insights.

## Rummaging for the Self

It is obvious that brain lesions and diseases distort the personal and social identities of the afflicted. It is also common experience that personal and social identity is gradually restored in the process of cure. Standing on this common



The Human Brain: 300 million feet of wiring



experience, numerous scientific disciplines and innumerable specialists are probing the human brain and cajoling it to give up its secrets. This has generated a lot of answers that have in turn churned out more questions. The mystery of the interaction between brain and mind seems to be getting ever more tangled. Idealists aver that the mind works the brain; Materialists say that the working of the brain gives rise to the mind, and so are minutely seeking its biological and chemical basis.

The brain is a complex structure. With a hundred billion cells (neurons), each with a thousand to ten thousand loosely connected synapses (connections between neurons), it makes for an estimated three hundred million feet of wiring. The cerebral cortex, the basis of our higher mental functions, is a thin convoluted layer of grey matter with a complex six-layered cellular architecture. These layers process impulses that are responsible for cognition, intelligence, memory, volition, and other higher human functions. It is also somewhere here in this labyrinth that the sense of self appears to be constructed, though opinion is divided regarding the exact location. Some researchers believe that the sense of self cannot be pinned down to any specific location but depends on global brain function. Others say that this search is like chasing the will o' the wisp, for the self is an illusion. It is much like looking for a ghost or spirit or soul, which is just not going to be found. In this context it must be mentioned that one Buddhist school of thought says that the well-known self is actually a 'non-self' or an 'illusion of self', and that this non-self, *anatta*, is constantly changing, being moulded and remoulded, with no abiding reality to it. But this view is not nihilistic; it shows a higher path, a higher direction and goal, in *nirvana*.

#### Cases in which the Self is Inferred to Exist

Most neurologists and psychologists do not, however, repudiate the concept of self. To psychologists the self is central to the human personality. It is the self that ties memories and per-

ceptions together, makes for a distinct identity, and negotiates interpersonal relations. Many disease states actually highlight this centrality of the self. Epilepsy or seizures can temporarily alter the self-notion of individuals, or in case of major seizures can actually knock the victim unconscious. But after the seizure is over, things normalize; the person picks him- or herself up, and continues just as before with the previous pattern of living and self-identity intact.

Altered perception of the self is central to most neuroses and psychoses, and this seriously handicaps the patient. In Cotard syndrome—a rare nihilistic delusional state—people can think and talk normally but are emotionally cut off and believe themselves to be dead or nonexistent. In other delusional states persons may feel themselves as made of glass, or even imagine they have been turned into a tree, an animal, or a bird, or into some other person. In all these cases the patient can recover with treatment, or the downslide may be arrested considerably, with the old self returning.

That memory is of critical importance to the notion of self and that memory has a physical basis in the brain is dramatically demonstrated in Alzheimer's disease. The neural degeneration that occurs in this disease leads to formation of non-functioning plaques in the brain, which inexorably robs patients of their memory and personal identity. These examples stress the fact that the self is not a chimera.

#### The Two Selves: Inner and Outer

Some psychologists and neurologists suggest that there is a robust 'core self', also called the 'primitive self', in every human, with an additional 'autobiographical' or 'extended self' shaped by life experiences. Ordinarily, the way we think of ourselves makes for our notion of personal identity. Personal identity is an elaborate structure, containing both conscious and subconscious elements derived from our knowledge, recollections and dispositions. This is the extended self. It is fragile. The core self, though characterized as robust, is also found to change



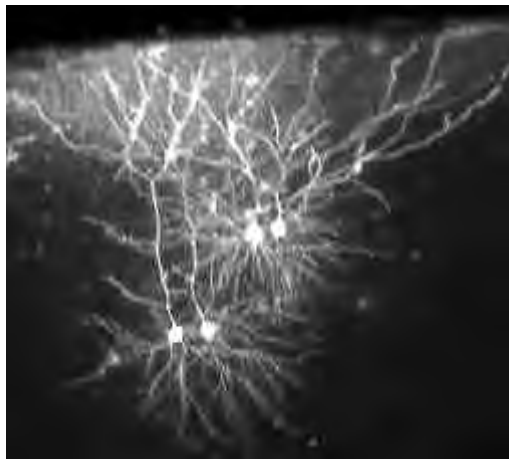
and is given to lapses. These two aspects of the self more or less coincide with the distinction that psychologists make between 'self as object' and 'self as process'. The former is the phenomenological self, which covers attitudes, perceptions, and memories, and which responds to the external world from its own frame of reference. The aggregate of these responses—the individual's thinking, feeling and willing—constitute the process that makes for the observed identity.<sup>2</sup>

### The Self in the Brain

Neurologists have been trying to locate specific regions in the brain that mediate identity. They have especially been looking at areas that deal with the representation of body-space. A study has implicated the right angular gyrus, located behind the right ear, as of importance in the construction of physical identity. This area processes continuous inputs from the visual, vestibular (pertaining to balance) and somatosensory systems and could in fact be part of a larger representational system. Another study has zeroed in on an area in the temporal lobe which seems to be involved in the highest levels of body representation. Here too, it is believed, physical identity could actually be the result of the combined function of several neural centres, and is therefore more likely a changing process than a fixed entity. Yet another study, using advanced SPECT (single photon emission computerized tomography) scans, suggests that the portion of the parietal lobe called orientation association area (OAA) is responsible for making the sharp distinction between self and non-self. This area also requires continuous sensory inputs to do its job. Thus there are several candidates for the neural correlate of the self, and there is no clear consensus among experts on this issue as yet.

### The Creation of Self with Every Perception

All brains are pre-wired in a similar manner, but (and this is a big but) there are marked variations in individual brain function. There



MARK MILLER

Neuronal network: mouse cingulate cortex

are also sex-related differences in brain anatomy and physiology. Moreover, the brain is a plastic organ and is continually being moulded by external influences. One study speaks of the 'core self' as the 'self of the present moment'. In the words of neurologist Antonio Damasio: 'This core self is a transient entity recreated for each and every object with which the brain interacts.' This may be a new line of thinking in neurology, but is actually a key concept in Kshanika Vijñanavada, an important ancient Buddhist school of philosophy. This school posits the self as a chain of momentary consciousness, each element of which is but transient and 'insubstantial'.

Stimuli entering the brain first pass through areas mediating subconscious processes. After this processing, the impulses rise to the conscious level. As a perception rises to the conscious level, it is appropriated by the self, giving rise to the sense of egoism. In the words of Swami Vivekananda: 'We have, then, two planes in which the human mind works. First is the conscious plane, in which all work is always accompanied with the feeling of egoism. Next comes the unconscious plane, where all work is unaccompanied by the feeling of egoism.'<sup>3</sup>

### Disappearance of the Self

We have recorded some useful insights into

the construction of the self. But these constructs can lie shattered with the mere rupture of a blood vessel, a viral attack, or an overdose of alcohol, drugs, tranquillizers, or anaesthesia. In sleep and swoon too the self appears dissolved. Is it held in abeyance, does it undergo temporary hibernation, or does it disintegrate? Is there another aspect of the self that we are ignorant of? The continuity of the self is clearly not affected by sleep or temporary episodes of unconsciousness. In cases where brain function is more seriously affected, the extended self and the core self may successively lose their integrity, ultimately leaving only an undifferentiated subjective awareness which may be very difficult to assess objectively.

It is this subjective realm that has been eluding the grasp of all our advances in imaging technology. Brain scans may be able to trace the neural correlates of consciousness, but consciousness *per se* is yet to yield an image. Vedantic philosophers point out that the neurological self (core, extended, or the undifferentiated subject) is an object of thought and not the thinker; the brain can be exposed and seen, but the self is a subject—personal, private, and hidden. When we think of the self, it is not the subjective self that we cognize but an object of thought.

### Prana as the Greatest

According to Indian philosophy it is Prana, the life force or vital force, that keeps the body functional. The Chhandogya Upanishad underscores this point through a charming allegory that is used for the purpose of meditation on Prana: the 'Oldest and Greatest'. A dispute once arose among the sensory-organs as to who was superior. Finding no solution, they repaired to their father Prajapati (the lord of creatures) to settle the dispute. 'He is the greatest among you on whose departure the body appears to be most despicable', replied Prajapati. Speech was the first to leave its abode in the body and go into voluntary exile for a year. On return, it enquired how the others had managed

in its absence. The other organs replied: 'Just as the dumb, without speaking; living with the help of Prana, seeing through the eye, hearing with the ear, thinking with the mind.' Speech re-entered the body disappointed. Next the eye and the ear left in succession. They too were disappointed to discover that except for blindness and deafness the body was all right. Then the mind went out. When it returned and made anxious enquiries, the sense organs chorused, 'We lived as children with unformed minds do, without thinking—living with the help of Prana, speaking with the tongue, seeing through the eye, hearing with the ear.' Dejected, the mind re-entered too. Now it was Prana's turn to leave. As it proceeded to depart, it 'pulled out the other organs as a spirited horse pulls out the pegs to which its legs have been tied'. It didn't require further persuasion to decide the winner. The sense organs and mind united in prayer to Prana: 'Be our ruler, you are the greatest, please do not depart.'<sup>4</sup>

### The Self as Distinct from the Physical Self

It is clear that even if the sensory and motor organs along with the mind are dysfunctional, life can and does go on. Can Prana then be the ultimate experienter, the master in the body? The Indian philosophers thought otherwise. Prana, with all its dimensions, is not only insentient but, being an aggregate, is also not classed as an independent entity in Indian philosophy. If Prana is not the ultimate experienter, what is? A metaphysical self cannot be part conscious and part unconscious; nor can it be circumscribed by Idealism or Materialism.

The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad has an instructive anecdote to illustrate why Prana is considered different from the experiencing subject.<sup>5</sup> Ajatashatru, king of Kashi, is approached by the proud orator Balaki, who wishes to instruct him on scriptural truths. Balaki considers Prana, the cosmic Energy (termed conditioned Brahman in the Upanishads) as the Self and starts instructing the king about this. But the king was already familiar with all the different

aspects of this cosmic Energy (from that associated with the sun to that residing in the heart and intellect) that Balaki wishes to explain. Balaki is soon reduced to being Ajatashatru's student. The king then leads him to a sleeping man whom he hails with the well-known epithets of Prana. Nothing happens. Ajatashatru then pushes the man repeatedly till he awakens and gets up. Ajatashatru has made his point without a word of explanation. The inability of Prana to respond to his call despite being active and the lack of response from the physical frame to an isolated touch were pointers to consciousness being a distinct entity. Sri Shankaracharya, in his commentary on this mantra, observes: 'Therefore it is proved that that which awoke through pushing—blazing forth, as it were, flashing, as it were, and come from somewhere, as it were, rendering the body different from what it was, endowing it with consciousness, activity, a different look, etc.—is an entity other than the body.'<sup>6</sup> The king then raises that famous question: 'When this being full of consciousness was thus asleep, where was it then and whence did it thus come back?' and proceeds to explain.

### Two States of the Atman

The Atman—that is the Vedantic term for self—has two aspects: conditioned and unconditioned. In its unconditioned state it is Brahman, absolute and non-dual. The conditioned state involves complete identification with the body, mind, senses, and life, making it empirical, as it were. This is termed *maya*. And this is how the Atman appears to be well or ill, asleep or awake, and so on. Just as sunlight passing through different coloured glasses appears differently coloured, so does the Atman appear affected by its conditionings. Thus the experienter, the conditioned Atman, appears to be handicapped when in a body with a defective brain. Again, it is only the subtle conditionings of the self that are responsible for its transmigration. In reality, the Atman neither comes nor goes, for it transcends the limitations of body

and mind. In reality we are not identical with our bodies; but at the same time our bodies are deeply involved in the process of self-awareness. We are custodians of the limitless within the limited.

### The Location and Activity of the Self

The Atman, the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad tells us, is 'identified with the intellect, the Manas [mind] and the vital force, with the eyes and ears', and so on.<sup>7</sup> 'When this being full of consciousness is thus asleep, it absorbs at the time the functions of the organs through its own consciousness, and lies in the Akasha (supreme Self) that is in the heart' (2.1.17). From there, on awakening, 'it comes back along the seventy-two thousand nerves called Hita which extend from the heart to the whole body' (2.1.19). 'The heart is the seat of the intellect [buddhi]', says Acharya Shankara, and clarifies: 'the internal organ [antahkarana], and the other or external organs are subject to that intellect. ... Therefore in accordance with the individual's past actions the intellect in the waking state extends, along those nerves interwoven like a fish-net, the functions of the organs such as the ear to their seats, the outer ear etc., and then directs them. The individual self pervades the intellect with a reflection of its own manifested consciousness. And when the intellect contracts, it too contracts. That is the sleep of this individual self. And when it perceives the expansion of the intellect, it is waking experience. It follows the nature of its limiting adjunct, the intellect, just as a reflection of the moon etc. follows the nature of the water and so forth.'<sup>8</sup>

### The Transitory and the Fundamental Self

There definitely is a map of the body's configuration in the brain that harmonizes all experiences of the individual. The angular gyrus mentioned before is implicated also in the phenomenon of phantom limb syndrome. An amputee continues to 'feel' the amputated limb because of the previous map of the limb's configu-

ration in the brain. This body representation and other neural correlates of consciousness are not static. But this working idea of self, however dynamic it may be, cannot satisfactorily answer some fundamental philosophical questions. Human values, ethics, dignity, knowledge, behaviour, beliefs, hopes and aspirations—all presuppose a permanent self.

### The Nature of the Atman

After moving over the rough ground of day-to-day experiences, tracing the twisted and bumpy tracks of neurology and psychology, and attempting to ascend the high peaks of Indian philosophy and metaphysics, one might just be tempted to throw in the towel. Fortunately for us, the words of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad are like the sun breaking through the mist of confusion: 'Explain to me', says Ushasta to Yajnavalkya, 'the self that is within all.' 'This is your self that is within all.' 'Which is within all, Yajnavalkya?' 'That which breathes through the Prana is your self that is within all ...' Yajnavalkya goes on to describe the Atman as taking care of digestion, metabolism, and other organic functions. Ushasta is not satisfied: 'You have indicated it as one may say that a cow is such and such, or a horse is such and such. Explain to me the Brahman that is immediate and direct.' Ushasta's exhortation is justified, for the self referred to in Yajnavalkya's statements appears no different from the empirical self, subject to birth, growth, transformation, disease, decay, and death. But Yajnavalkya lays to rest such speculation with an emphatic assertion of the Atman that is unconditioned and absolute: 'You cannot see that which is the witness of vision; you cannot hear that which is the hearer of hearing; you cannot think that which is the thinker of thought; you cannot know that which is the knower of knowledge. This is your self that is within all; everything else but this is perishable.'<sup>9</sup>

This is that truth beyond the empirical parameters of science that we need to seek, indi-

vidually as well as collectively. The Mundaka Upanishad says: 'There are two types of knowledge, the higher and the lower.' The lower knowledge comprises the objective sciences and 'the higher is that by which the imperishable Atman is known'.<sup>10</sup> This reality, the infinite, eternal, pure, and non-dual Atman, can also be the subject of study like any scientific search or experiment; only this study has its own methodology and takes a good deal more time and preparation.

We need to strive to bring the eternal truth of Advaita (non-duality) to bear upon the many challenging issues that we face; we need to strive to translate the Atman's self-awareness in the brain into concrete action in the world, especially in the field of mental hygiene. Were our relationships and institutions based on the knowledge of the Atman's permanence and stability, a saner age with saner individuals would be ushered in. ~

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# Dancing Shiva and the Self-creating World

DR BEATRICE BRUTEAU

Shiva Nataraja is my favourite image for the Total Real. Shiva, as such, is understood to be the Absolute, the Infinite. But Shiva dancing is the cosmos, the moving finite. And the individual (human being), the witness-agent, is their oneness. The image reminds us that the dance is nothing but the dancer in motion. It is not a separable product of the dancer's activity in the way that a pot is separate from the potter.

I will urge here that the world is not an illusion, a mistake, an accident, a testing-ground, or a devil's playground. It is indeed a divine dance, a godly word. It evolves, it has creativity and rules of its own, it isn't a finished product. Consciousness, the divine Spirit, is growing in it. This makes the fuller expression of divine values more and more possible, and it is as participants in this process that the responsibility of individuals and their collectives comes more and more to the fore. The goal of life is not to escape from the world into heaven or nirvana but to nurture the expressive dance, to enable it more and more to say the divine word, to bring consciousness to greater realization of the oneness of the Absolute and its dance/word. In this context I will develop some detail about the evolution, the consciousness, and the responsibility.

## The Absolute and Its Gestures

There is a famous representation of Shiva-Shava-Shakti: as a dead body (Shava),

from which rises a waking body (Shiva), on which dances a vigorous body (Shakti). When Shiva is in contact with Shakti, Shiva awakes; without this contact, Shiva is shava, a corpse. The message is that Shiva, the absolute ground of Being, has two aspects: the shava aspect, withdrawn from the world, transcending all activity,

all description, without name or form, infinite; and the shakti aspect, the full activity of the world, expressed, manifested, engaged, full of names and forms of all descriptions, finite but constantly changing, growing, evolving novelties.

The important point to grasp is that both aspects, the Ground as transcending all form and the Ground as expressive in all form, are real and possessed of immeasurable value.

Indeed, they are two aspects of one Being. This is the 'nondual' truth. The various forms of which the world is composed are dependent on the transcendent formless

Ground; while the latter is not dependent on anything. It is necessary Being, absolute Being—not relative to anything else, having no opposite, no environment, no comparison. Nevertheless, the world-forms, each contingent upon the Ground, are themselves nothing but the actual Ground itself in the act of 'expressing'. This is why the image of the Dancer is so apt.

Of the Absolute nothing can be said that implies reference to another being. But some things can be said on the understanding that they are strictly themselves; there is no need to





make reference to anything else to make clear their reality, their meaning, and their value. For instance, in the Upanishadic tradition we speak of Sat-Chit-Ananda: Being, Consciousness, and Bliss may be affirmed of the Absolute on the understanding that they themselves are absolute and imply no reference or dependency. In the Western tradition we speak of the transcendentals, themselves necessary and ungrounded: Being, Unity, Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. Plato, for instance, spoke of 'the Good in itself', 'the Beautiful in itself'. It also has to be understood that these are not abstractions drawn from experience of limited things and relative values. Maimonides, for instance, was so concerned that we not apply to God the kind of 'goodness' that we contrast with 'badness', that he proposed that we not call God 'good' at all. But these transcendentals are meant as the actualities themselves which express as the limited and relative and contrasted things of the world. The fact that we can 'know' the transcendentals is an indication that we ourselves have the 'necessary being' aspect of reality as well as the relative and contingent aspect.

Following the metaphysics of the Dancer, we can say that the things and relations of the world are the 'gestures' of the absolute Ground. The Ground 'gestures'—dances—because the transcendentals are 'diffusive of themselves'. Goodness would not be goodness if it did not communicate goodness. Built into the very ground of Existence is this diffusive, communicative, expressive character. The Shakti-Shiva is God's ecstasy. Ecstatic dancing represents God's creative, self-expressive being-goodness-beauty communicating aspect. As Goodness is necessarily communicative of itself, so God is necessarily ecstatic.

The dance consists of a variety of gestures. The gestures are particular beings and the relations among them. They are finite, definable, relative, contingent. Nevertheless, they are the Absolute's self-expression. The thesis here is that it is erroneous to oppose the world to the Ground/God. God has no opposite, and the

world is God in ecstasy. It is illusion to think that the world has no Ground, and equally illusory to think that it is other than the Ground. If there were anything 'other than' the Ground, the so-called Ground would not be the ground of everything. 'Otherness', like every relation, is strictly inapplicable to the Ground.

But it is necessary that God be expressive, and it is God who is actively doing the expressing, and therefore the world is real and valuable. It is God's own 'intention', self-originated action. It is not an accident on the part of the Void (though that may well be involved in how it is done<sup>1</sup>), and it is not an illusion on the part of the human perceiver (though perception is filtered and framed<sup>2</sup>). And it is certainly not the invention of a deity who wants to test people to see whether they deserve rewards or punishments.

The world is God's intention, *kavannah*, something meaningful in which investment is being made. Energy is being committed to it, a value is being sought in it—in this case, that the world should indeed be expressive of the unity, truth, goodness, and beauty of the absolute Ground. The world is to realize itself as the endlessly evolving forms of generous and creative being-sharing. The goal of the denizens of the world such as ourselves, therefore, is not to escape the world but to help create the world.

It is a self-creating world. When the creative Ground expresses itself, it inevitably expresses creativity. And the self-diffusing quality of the transcendentals also characterizes the world. Creativity and generosity are qualities of the world from the very beginning and continue to characterize the way the world evolves. The 'generosity' shows in the way force-fields are extended in space and communicate their particular forces to whatever receptive entities lie within their effective ranges. Indeed, 'generosity' shows in all cosmic acts of communication of energy and information. And 'creativity' shows in the way new properties arise from the interactions of particular beings. Protons share their strong-nuclear force (generosity) and ac-



cording to their number manifest as quite different elements (creativity). These different atoms generously share their electrostatic forces and create novel molecules. The interactivities of molecules constitute 'living' in an enormous variety of forms, and living beings form organisms by symbiosis of differentiated organs and tissues, and finally there arise communities of these organisms in ecosystems. Creativity shows both in the novelty of the wholeness of the interacting entities and in the differentiation of tasks—and consequently of forms—within the wholeness.



Every time a new level of energy-sharing union is formed, a whole new kind of world comes into being: elementary particles share their characteristic energies and make atoms; atoms share

and form molecules; molecules communicate to constitute living cells; cells cooperate as organisms and organisms as communities. And each time such a new level of organization is gained, there is more novelty, unpredictability of what the union will be like and be able to do, and more irreducibility to its components. Each level has ultimately to be understood in its own terms, just as its most significant interactions will be with its peers, other wholes of the same level.

Each advance, by uniting the entities of the previous level, exhibits a greater variety of elements united and of relations unifying them. This is its complexity. It also exhibits increasing 'consciousness' because there is at each step a more intense union and greater interdependence of the elements and processes involved. Furthermore, there is a greater indispensability of each component and each interaction with the environment, and all of this means greater organization of stimuli (incoming energy and information) and responses (outgoing energy and information). The tighter organization means more centredness, more integration, of the whole entity.

And all of this, together with the increased

variety of interactions with the environment, means an increase in 'freedom', more alternatives and greater delay between stimulus and response while internal processing is going on, and thus, finally, more spontaneity, more originality—as distinguished from mere response—of behaviour. And all along there has been increasing consciousness.

### The Evolution of Consciousness

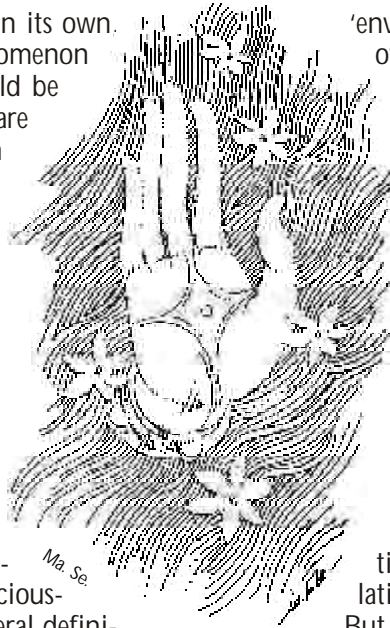
The parallel evolution of complexity and consciousness is the idea made famous by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, especially in his *The Phenomenon of Man*.<sup>3</sup> Complexity advances by uniting entities and differentiating forms and functions among them. And consciousness advances by opening more channels of interaction with the environment and developing more operations on received information. Eventually these internal operations form closed loops independent of communication with the exterior, and concepts, memories, anticipations, projections, and such purely internal matters become the integrating functions of the organism, the seat of unity and wholeness. When the concept of 'consciousness' is formed to label certain internal events, another loop is closed and the being is said to be 'self-conscious', that is, conscious of being conscious. Consciousness itself becomes the object of consciousness.

But who is the subject of this consciousness? Who is it who is 'conscious'? the body? the brain? We humans have the subjective experience of being conscious. Do other kinds of being also have some version of this experience? Why should there be subjective experience? It seems that the brain/body complex can receive information, process it, and act on it without being subjectively aware of doing so. So why should consciousness have evolved? What use does it have?

Questions such as these have led some brain/consciousness scientists to suggest that we might put aside the attempt to give a full account of consciousness in terms of material-energetic movements. Consciousness itself may

be a 'primitive', something on its own, not a derivative or an epiphenomenon of something else.<sup>4</sup> This could be the case even though there are matching parallels between objective observations and subjective experiences. Teilhard's idea was that consciousness is like a 'lining' for the fabric of material organization, going all the way back to the origin of this universe. How could it be otherwise? Where would you draw the line between the conscious beings and those unconscious? and on what grounds?

If we reflect on this suggestion of the primitivity of consciousness, we may find a very general definition of consciousness to be helpful, something that would cover even the earliest and simplest of cosmic interactions. Suppose we say that consciousness is the ability selectively to detect relevant features of one's environment and to respond to them appropriately, plus the ability to detect that this behaviour is going on. If a proton is in close enough range of another proton, it 'feels' the strong force between them: that is, it moves toward the other, it acts in a way that indicates awareness of the presence of the other and of the nature of the relationship between them. If it is too far away for the strong force to be effective, it will 'feel' and respond in terms of the electrostatic force and move away from the other positively charged particle. It detects the presence of the other, the distance, and the now relevant relationship. Is this minimal 'consciousness'—being able to receive information from your appropriate environment and respond to it accordingly? Does this amount to 'knowing' that the other is there, even knowing where, and knowing what it is, and knowing how to react to it (not that it has any choice), knowing what is going on in your significant environment? Later on in the cosmic evolution,



'environment' would include your own body, its outside and its inside, and mentality itself. And this awareness would be an outgrowth from the minimal ability that was there from the beginning.

Wherever there is finitude, there will be relation, and consciousness is awareness of the presence of relation. Without this 'awareness' there would not be 'relation'. This is what it would mean to declare that 'consciousness' is a primitive, an original in-itself form of being. It is essential to the nature of the finite, relational, interacting world.

But if this minimal consciousness evolves into human consciousness, with its concepts and its awareness of the infinite, the transcendentals, the divine, the forms, the nondual ontology, then are the minimal and intermediate degrees of consciousness the 'expressions' of 'infinite consciousness'? Is 'infinite consciousness' actually present in us all, as the transcendentals are, expressing itself according to the degree of complexity of relations of the being of which it is the interior 'lining'? When it knows that it is conscious, then has it burst through some critical threshold and realized that it is itself the Ground—in this particular form—and has it thus transcended its own finite nature in an ecstatic movement that is the reciprocal of the divine Dancer's original ecstasy?

If so, then the human being—or any being capable of such transcendent ecstasy—knows itself to be a member of a great 'fractal' or 'holographic' expression of a single pattern that carries all the characteristics of the maximal wholeness at every scale of its compounded organization.

Some people have had vivid experiences of this. Here is an account by Han Shan, a Chinese Mahayana Buddhist: 'Suddenly I stood still,

filled with the realization that I had no body and no mind. All I could see was one great illuminating Whole, omnipresent, perfect, lucid, and serene. ... After the great somersault, the great Void is broken through. Oh, how freely come and go the myriad forms of things! Here is another, from Master Hsueh Yen:

As I was just going to sit down, something broke through abruptly before my face as if the ground were sinking away. I wanted to tell how I felt, but I could not express it. Nothing in this world can be used as a simile to describe it. ... I looked up at the sky and down at the earth. I actually felt that all phenomena and manifestations, the things I saw with my eyes and heard with my ears ... all flowed out from my own bright, true, and marvellous Mind.<sup>5</sup>

We are now in a position to propose that there is yet another way of stating this nondual thesis: The Total Real is both subjective and objective. Realization of the infinite Ground expressing itself is the *sine qua non* of our spiritual life. But because the projection of the world is that Ground's own intentional act, develop-



ment of the world is also our vocation. This is why the Zen Ox-Herding Pictures pass through the empty circle and end with the re-entry into world-community life with gifts

to share. Our personal subjective spiritual attainment is not the whole story. There is also the objective attainment of the world to consider. The human being therefore makes a double effort: to realize oneself as the Absolute in action, and to join with others to continue making the created order a worthy expression of the absolute Goodness.

### Spiritual Practice and the Critical Shift in Consciousness

There is one practice we could all undertake that would work on both of these objectives. It comes from Psalm 16: 'I have placed the divine Presence before me always.' We can feel

free to manipulate the translation to suit our own outlook: 'I sense the Total Real around me always', 'I look for God in everyone and everything', 'I seek and find the divine Presence in myself and in all else.' Really practising doing this is transforming.

In our Shiva language we would say that Shiva-Shakti is the Life-Energy in everything; there is divinity in all. The tripartite Integral Yoga enables us to manifest this. Jnana Yoga understands it. This is what we have been doing above, explaining the metaphysics that underlies our everyday lives. We have to be clear on this because if we make assumptions about how-things-are that support beliefs in separation, scarcity, insecurity, and fear, we will never attain the double goal proposed. Many people who take up the spiritual life in a serious way do not like to do 'head-work', but head-work is necessary; it is part of the make-up of the human being, and it addresses part of the reality of 'what-Is'. It cannot be neglected, because out of the way we perceive and think come the ways we feel and act.

If we look at the world with the intention of devoting ourselves to helping it become an expression of the absolute Goodness, we will see that it needs a good deal of work. The multitude of ills from which we suffer do not need to be listed, but it can be helpful to observe them closely enough to see that most of them arise from efforts of human beings to dominate other people and the environment. Domination means determining for other beings whether they may exist, where and how they may exist, what they may do, what their roles are to be, what their value is, how they are to relate to other beings, what their names are. Why do people feel impelled to do this? It looks like ambition, arrogance, pride, aggressiveness, but pressing deeper into those feelings we find insecurity, belief in scarcity—of material and social goods—and existential fear. We experience ourselves alone and powerless in Being. Others are truly 'other', alien to us. We are not safe, we cannot protect ourselves, cannot trust. We are

separate selves. What being we have we try to secure by making it different from others: I am I to the extent that I am not-you, and you similarly are not-I. We mutually negate one another.

To find ourselves as the Absolute in action, as partners in the great work of Creation, this whole line of thinking, feeling, perceiving has to shift. If we start at the bottom, with the mutual negation, we replace it with mutual affirmation: I am I by affirming you, by giving you energy-to-be, willing you well. This at once overcomes the sense of separation and enables us to be deeply engaged in one another's lives. Not being aliens, we are able finally to love one another: the neighbour is actually seen as profoundly related to my self and so I can will the well-being of the neighbour as my self. And then there is no longer need to protect, promote, advance myself over any other or need to try to turn the other to my advantage. We can have communities of friendship and cooperation instead of economic/political systems based on competition, hostility, and domination.<sup>6</sup>

Fine. But how do we make that critical turn from mutual negation to mutual affirmation? Where do we get the freedom from insecurity to be able to do that? It has to come, as the Buddha said, from right views and right efforts, followed by all sorts of right actions. This is why seeing the Total Real as Dancing Shiva—or its equivalent under any other metaphor—is the place to start. Perhaps the story of Jesus, the Jewish Hasid, the devout one, can be helpful.

We are told that on the occasion of his baptism Jesus had a deep realization of the nature of things. The event is related in conventional Jewish idioms: he felt the heavens were opened to him, the Holy Spirit of God descended on him as a dove, and he heard a heavenly voice. What the voice said was: 'You are my beloved offspring; I take delight in you.'

Now this was not exactly news. The book of Deuteronomy (14.1) had said plainly: 'You are children of God.' It was, in fact, something that

'everybody knows'. Nevertheless, the story shows us a man who was suddenly struck by this, who was awestricken, who really heard it and saw the difference it would make if we all could realize its foundational truth. This is what happens in jnana. You see something that has been before your face forever, see it for the first time, see it directly, in itself, in its fundamental reality. This act of seeing is intellectual intuition: knowing directly, not by sensory or emotional experience, not as derived from some other ideas, but in its own original existential reality.



And what the whole story about Jesus shows us is someone seeing in this way and then drawing conclusions from the insight, and then putting these conclusions into action. The insight and the action are the response to the double vocation to realize yourself as the Absolute's dance-gesture and to unite with others in furthering the creation as God's self-expression. I interpret the story as showing that he realized on the deepest level that every being is an 'offspring' of God; we are all 'beloved children', in whom the absolute Ground—the Dancer—the Parent 'takes delight'. (To be concluded)

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# From Intellect to Intelligence: Taking the Quantum Leap

DR SAMPOORAN SINGH AND DR KANWALJIT KAUR

**T**he human brain is a part of the objective world and can be investigated objectively. The human mind is however a subjective entity. There is no problem more mysterious than the mind-brain-body interaction. Modern science has not made it less intractable. Rather, it has added a new urgency and also a new poignancy to it.

In dealing with subtle phenomena in the waking state of mind, we have to recognize the fact that the act of observation is accompanied by an inevitable disturbance which alters the state of the observed system in an unpredictable manner. What is observed is different from what was before the act of observation. Objective measurement and verification can therefore no longer be absolute tests of reality.

Many eminent scientists—including Albert Einstein, Werner Heisenberg, Erwin Schrodinger, and Arthur Eddington—have stumbled upon another mode of knowing: direct, intimate, intuitive (insightful), or ‘the understanding of life directly, instead of in the abstract, linear terms of representational thinking’.<sup>1</sup> The mind-brain-body system makes a quantum jump from rationality to intuition, and this transformation is not governed by reason or analytical logic. The quantum jump is a tiny but explosive leap of energy from one system to another in a fraction of a second. This new order cannot be found in matter; rather, it has to be traced to the minds of the physicists.

Life is a mysterious whole. It is non-fragmentary indivisible wholeness wherever it exists. It is infinite, immeasurable, and eternal. It is a scientific exploration or a pilgrimage in itself. The aim of human life is to undertake inner transformation. This presupposes a willingness

to live, and a willingness to observe life manifesting in multidimensional forms with an open or receptive mind. Openness or receptivity implies that inwardly we are not preoccupied with any other activity during the act of perception—seeing, or hearing, or anything else. The aim of human life is to make a quantum jump from the individual waking state of consciousness (which is ‘successive consciousness’) to the awareness of wholeness, the oneness of life (which may be called ‘simultaneous consciousness’ or ‘life field’).

Reason or ‘intellectual construction’ is a precious capability thrown up by evolution and is the source of much human progress in culture and civilization. In spite of this progress over uncountable millennia, humanity has failed to resolve psychological imbalances and ecological crises manifesting in the rising waves of violence and crime, religious fundamentalism, ethnic conflicts, and corruption, as well as in increasing unemployment, poverty, hunger, malnutrition, and health crises. Recent challenges include terrorism, hijacking, and drug trafficking. All appeals to achieve full disarmament and permanent peace; all declarations by Nobel laureates; all resolutions of the Pugwash Conferences; all proclamations of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW); all pronouncements of eminent scientists, philosophers, and mystics have fallen on the deaf ears of humanity.

Albert Einstein, the greatest physicist of this age, observed that (i) the human psyche during the first few decades of the twentieth century got heavily conditioned and lost its sensitivity; and (ii) this loss of sensitivity is leading people to self-destruction and self-annihilation.



Psychological imbalances (anger, fear, envy, greed, and so on) have endangered every form of relationship: between different individuals, between humans and other organisms, and between humans and the environment. Humanity stands now at the edge of an abyss of total annihilation. The extinction of life is at the very core of human anxiety.

### Limitations of the Intellect

The Problem of Duality: The mind divides itself into subject and object. The seer (subject) and the seen (object) are within the same energy web, so there is sharing of energy; and both get mutilated in the process. We could write this as

Object (Fact) + Subject (Recalled Memory) → Mutilated Fact + Mutilated Memory

From pure perception (fact), we proceed to identification and recognition, and this distorts the pure perception to mutilated perception. Knowledge is invariably indirect perception. This is because of the subject-object duality. As the dualistic approach has become so ingrained, and because the error of dualism is at the very root of intellection, it is next to impossible to uproot it through intellection.

The brain constructs distorted images and then stores them as frequency and amplitude information (knowledge), and this is called conditioning. The brain has been trained or conditioned to interpret behaviour patterns. It has been conditioned to deduce conclusions, analyse, compare, evaluate, and arrive at judgments. It is meant for receiving data (which is different from the percept, and is therefore inaccurate), processing, interpreting, and reacting to it. Knowledge, therefore, is neither the result of, nor can lead to, direct perception.

Our thoughts are individual expressions of the collective past, organized and standardized by society. Thinking is a mechanical movement. It is a reaction of the past to the present challenge. We live with a set of false percepts, ideals, motives, and desires, and are unaware of the truth. This is the basic limitation of the intellect. And this is leading us into an abyss.

The challenges facing humankind are not in the external world, but are embedded in the conditioned mind-brain-body system—in past experience and knowledge. All our conditioning is amalgamated, organized, and standardized. This leads to loss of the elegance of humility and inno-

cence. Paradoxical though it may seem, it is knowledge that is holding the whole world to ransom.

The Confines of Knowledge: (i) Knowledge is never at the core of growth or developmental efforts. It is repetitive, mechanistic, and pertains to the past. Intellect and reason cannot transform the conditioned psyche because the intellect is at the same level as its conditionings. Psychologists affirm that knowledge (information), thought structures, ideals, beliefs, and concepts are incapable of transforming the basic human psyche.

(ii) No human problem, no problem of human relationship, can ever be fully resolved through mere knowledge or thought at the cerebral level. Knowledge does not result in a direct appreciation of others. People can never be happy and at peace with themselves and in love with fellow human beings unless they become aware of the homogeneous indivisible wholeness of life.

(iii) What we call knowing is only a chain



A Quantum Leap



of reactions and organized structural patterns.

(iv) Geared only to knowledge, humans lose their perceptive sensitivity at an accelerated pace and become irrational. This is why we have become extroverted and divorced from Reality. We are losing the gift of intuition and spontaneity. We need to rectify this error and live in symbiosis with nature.

The Spectrum of Consciousness: In a radical leap of genius, Max Planck proposed that energy is not continuous, but is transferred in discrete packets or quanta. Fritjof Capra mentions that 'the human mind is capable of two kinds of knowledge or two modes of consciousness. These have been termed as the rational and the intuitive. ... The patterns scientists observe in nature are intimately connected with the patterns of their minds—with their concepts, thoughts and values.' Our normal waking consciousness or rational mode of consciousness constructs time-space-causation matrices in quick succession, and this we call 'successive consciousness'. The order of the universe is the order of our minds. The mind has the capacity to make a quantum leap from successive consciousness to 'simultaneous consciousness', or to a non-dual or non-conceptual frame of reference. Non-duality is at a higher quantum energy potential, as it were, when compared to the dualistic frame of reference. So intuition has a higher energy potential than thought or memory. The art of living consists in attaining higher and higher levels of consciousness. In 'intelligence', consciousness is at its highest potential.

### The Benediction of Nature

Nature, in its bounty, has a hidden potential embedded within it—a non-dual and non-conceptual frame of reference within the mind. Albert Einstein had observed that 'objective observing and understanding' brings about a mutation of the human psyche. Max Planck, who laid the foundations of quantum mechanics, wrote: 'It is a fact that there is a point, one single point in the immeasurable expanse of mind and matter, where science, and therefore every

causal method of research is inapplicable, not only on practical grounds, but also on logical grounds, and will always remain inapplicable. This is the point of individual awareness.'<sup>2</sup>

The foundation of creativity is embedded in that single point in the 'immeasurable expanse of mind and matter', and this is the point of our 'individual awareness'. All great discoveries have arisen from the realm of our individual awareness. This awareness is timeless, so subjective scientific enquiry is not a cerebral activity involving gathering of information, but a quest in timelessness, in the realm divine. The foundation of human life is not knowledge, but intuition.

The eminent astronomer Edwin Hubble had this to say on intuition: 'The world of pure values, that world which science cannot enter, has no concern whatsoever with probable knowledge. The finality—eternal, ultimate truth—is earnestly sought. And sometimes, through the strangely compelling experience of mystical insight, a man knows beyond the shadow of a doubt that he has been in touch with a reality that lies behind mere phenomena. He himself is completely convinced, but he cannot communicate the certainty. It is a private revelation. He may be right, but unless we share his ecstasy, we cannot know.'<sup>3</sup> It is evident that one who perceives the intuition may be right, but one cannot communicate the certainty. It is a private revelation.

This suggests that we will have to transcend reason to go beyond cerebral activity and discover a qualitatively different movement of energy (the 'unconditioned energy') within ourselves. This is to go beyond the knowledge and experience that condition us. This unconditioned energy is synergistic with but independent of cerebral energy, thought, knowledge, and experience.

### Intelligence

If we observe the movement of thought and sound without interfering in their flow, then we are attentive. From the experiencer and the doer, the analyser and the interpreter, we bring

ourselves to the state of observation. To observe is to be attentive without a choice. It is observation through non-reactive attention. We have to educate ourselves in this faculty of observation: to look at a thing but not evaluate it.

The art of objective observation and understanding is at a higher 'energy potential' than the normal psychological mode of mind (which involves considerable dissipation of energy), so it results in a quantum leap from the dualistic frame of reference to the non-dual and non-conceptual frame. This non-dual frame is timeless.

### Spirituality

Spirituality involves understanding of the conditioned mind (the material content of consciousness) and also the apprehension of unconditioned energy; so it is the science of the wholeness of life. It aims at self-actualization or unfoldment of the hidden human potential. Spirituality is fundamental, objective science is derivative. An integration of science and spirituality is the key to the survival of humankind.

In spiritual science, the emphasis is on the act of perception, the quality of the instruments employed for perception, and the quality of consciousness behind perception. Spirituality involves exploration of the 'maximum energy potential' of consciousness. Both science in its most liberal form and spirituality have a non-authoritarian approach.

Spirituality deals with that consciousness which is eternal, infinite, immortal, self-existent, called the Spirit, Self, Brahman, the Divine, or simply Consciousness. All spiritual life is, in principle, a growth into divine living. True spirituality is not to renounce life, but to make life perfect through divine intent. In genuine spirituality, consciousness is freed of its material content (or ego). This leads to an awareness of the divine presence in all things, always, for Consciousness is a timeless singularity.

We need to live constantly in the presence of the Divine, in the feeling that it is this presence which moves us and is doing everything. Communion with the Divine, the Eternal, the

In the very act of interpreting the universe, we are creating the universe. Through our meanings we change nature's being. Man's meaning-making capacity turns him into nature's partner, a participant in shaping her evolution. The word does not merely reflect the world, it also creates the world. ... Through us, the universe questions itself and tries out various answers on itself in an effort—parallel to our own—to decipher its own being.

—David Bohm

Infinite, is a happening; it is not a result of our actions. The uncovering of this secret is not a human achievement; it is something that happens when human beings relax all their conditionings and confront the mystery of life in utter humility, in utter nakedness of the psyche. Only then does this mystery uncover itself.

### The Principle of Objectivation

Exclusive Nature of Objective Science: Around 1947, Erwin Schrodinger proposed the 'principle of objectivation'. He wrote, 'Without being aware of it and without being rigorously systematic about it, we exclude the Subject of Cognizance from the domain of nature that we endeavour to understand.'<sup>4</sup> He added, 'Mind has erected the objective outside world of the natural philosopher out of its own stuff. Mind could not cope with this gigantic task otherwise than by the simplifying device of excluding itself—withdrawing from its conceptual creation. Hence the latter does not contain its creator' (131). He also quoted Charles Sherrington: 'The material world has only been constructed at the price of taking the self, that is, mind, out of it, removing it; mind is not part of it; obviously, therefore, it can neither act on it nor be acted on by any of its parts' (128).

The eminent British neurologist John Eccles pierces the sensory illusion with some startling but irrefutable assertions: 'I want you to realize that there is no colour in the natural world and no sound—nothing of this kind; no

texture, no patterns, no beauty, no scent ...<sup>5</sup> In short, none of the objective facts upon which we usually base our appraisal of reality is fundamentally valid. He also emphasized the need 'to deal scientifically with the neglected area of inner conscious awareness'. Wills Harman added, 'Our daily experience of reality is our own conscious awareness.'<sup>6</sup>

Schrodinger emphasized the same point when he said that 'our world picture (is) "colourless, cold, mute". Colour and sound, hot and cold are our immediate sensations; small wonder that they are lacking in a world model from which we have removed ourselves. ... The physical world picture lacks all the sensual qualities that go to make up the Subject of Cognizance. The model is colourless and soundless and unpalpable.'<sup>7</sup> The world of science is neutral to ethical and aesthetic values.

There is no energy interaction between the objective world and the purely subjective domain of Consciousness, because thought cannot cross the 'event horizon' of the physical world.<sup>8</sup> Physicists call the boundary which sharply demarcates phenomena occurring at or below the speed of light the 'event horizon'. It separates the 'time-field' from the timeless realm. The speed of light is an absolute entity—one of nature's enigmatic physical constants. It is like a wall that no object can crash through. As we approach the wall, time slows down, mass increases, and space contracts.<sup>8</sup> So how does one bridge this gap between the object and the subject?

**Subjective Research:** The theory of Yoga tells us that if observation of 'objective truth' is continued long enough, then this objective truth (the datum of observation) goes into abeyance and subjective truth is perceived. The universal consciousness observes itself through itself. It is by means of this experience that the subject attains to wholeness of life. And this realization can have remarkable effects.

Living in the present, the now, heals, and living in the past and in duality suppresses humankind's perceptive sensitivity and enhances

disease. Observation of objective facts without justification or condemnation releases tremendous energy.

According to neuroscientist Karl Pribram, 'Brain science must deal with the awareness of awareness. It could no longer afford to shut out that part of the world which we call subjective.'<sup>9</sup> Roger Sperry, who won the Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine in 1981, has also focussed on 'the neglected area of science, the study of human subjective experience'. He pointed out that 'instead of renouncing or ignoring consciousness, the new interpretation gives full recognition to the primacy of inner conscious experience as a causal reality'.<sup>10</sup> He underscored the holistic functioning of the brain: 'When the brain is whole, the unified consciousness of the left and the right hemispheres adds up to more than the individual properties of the separate hemispheres.' His studies raised the issue of consciousness in a new way: 'When parts come together in a new whole, this new whole exhibits features—emergent properties—that can't be predicted as a rule from the parts, and cannot be explained in terms of the parts.'

Wilder Penfield, the pioneering Canadian brain surgeon, observed that the fact that the mind can survive brain trauma and function under anaesthesia points very strongly to the separate existence of the mind. Penfield came to the conclusion that 'it is the mind which experiences and it is the brain which records the experience'.<sup>11</sup> He was of the opinion that the mind must be a kind of invisible energy-field that includes the brain, perhaps even controls it. He wrote, 'To suppose that consciousness or the mind has location is a failure to understand neurophysiology.'<sup>12</sup>

The Universal Consciousness, the Reality, or the 'life-field' heals, because it has the dimensions of wholeness: creativity and spontaneity, non-violence, beauty and harmony, love and compassion. Man has to choose between healing and annihilation, between the Buddha (wisdom) and the bomb (self-destruction).

### Insight: The Intuitive Mode of Knowing

Galileo Galilei taught us that the uncritical acceptance of sense data from the environment, something which merely adds to our memory store, is insufficient for understanding nature. He taught us that purposefully designed experiments are of vital importance in uncovering truths hidden in nature. He asked questions of nature and succeeded in receiving answers directly from nature.<sup>13</sup>

The philosopher of religion Alan Watts advocated 'letting go of expectation' and amazingly found that this was enough to free him: 'For quite suddenly the weight of my own body disappeared. I felt that I owned nothing, not even a self, and that nothing owned me. The whole world became as transparent and unobstructed as my own mind. The problem of life simply ceased to exist.'<sup>14</sup>

Einstein too experienced moments of complete liberation from space-time boundaries: 'At such moments one imagines that one stands on some spot on a small planet gazing in amazement at the cold and yet profoundly moving beauty of the eternal, the unfathomable. Life and death flow into one, and there is neither evolution nor eternity, only Being' (280). He wrote to a friend, 'I feel myself so much a part of all life that I am not in the least concerned with the beginning or the end of the concrete existence of any particular person in this unending stream' (303).

Alexander Koyre wrote that in the world of science 'there is a place for everything, there is no place for man. ... Two worlds: this means two truths, or no truth at all. This is the tragedy of modern mind which "solved the riddle of the universe", but only to replace it by another riddle: the riddle of itself.'<sup>15</sup> Herman Weyl observed, 'Scientists would be wrong to ignore the fact that theoretical construction is not the only approach to the phenomena of life; another way, that of understanding from within, is open to us. ... This inner awareness of myself is the basis for the understanding of my fellowmen' (311).

According to Nobel laureate Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, 'It is physics that presupposes an observer within the observed world. Our dialogue [the dialogue between science and spirituality] will be successful only if it is carried on from within nature' (218). Both universal Consciousness and the subjective dimension are 'within nature'. The objective world is perceived only in a mediate fashion, but universal Consciousness is aware of 'absolute subjectivity' and the 'subjective world' in a non-mediate fashion. But the way to absolute subjectivity is through the objective realm. So subjective science must flow through the objective sciences. This is the basis of the 'symbiosis of science and spirituality' for which humankind has been waiting for uncountable millennia. ~

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## The Idea of Light

In February, we published Hiranyagarbha's poem *The Idea of Light*, and asked you for your views on it. The variety of responses demonstrates that a poem, or any text, is open to various interpretations. What does it mean? It seems to depend on who is reading it!

Our respondents tackled the conundrum in various ways. Let us see what they had to say.

Light is Sat-Chit-Ananda

Nirmala Solanky Venkateswaran, of Chennai, writes:

Light to me means the primordial principle, tattva-satchidananda, out of which all the worlds and universe are manifested.

The salt doll went to measure the sea but melted into it and never returned to report.

One in ignorance, having a bloated ego with its various friends like distrust, doubt, and other negative emotions, cannot have a glimpse of that 'Awareness', as I would like to call satchidananda.

To Shoot: when the egoistic battalion tries to erase that 'Awareness' through various mechanisms, the contrary only happens, provided one is sincere in one's [spiritual] efforts. The 'awareness' only gets sharpened and becomes one-pointed, eliminating all negativity. Thus the one who went to change the light got changed himself. The thin line disappears and the particle of bright light gets merged with the Ocean of Light.

Ammunition: When one rises to the level of 'Awareness' above the mind-intellect-ego and tries to undo the thin line separating oneself from the ocean of Truth, it is the same tattva (principle) that becomes sharp ammunition too—just as electricity makes ice in a refrigerator, heats water in a geyser, gives light through a bulb, and breeze through a cooler. While shooting the Light, that tattva or 'Awareness' becomes a part of it, instead of destroying it.

In the womb of the bright Golden Yellow One (Hiranyagarbha) everything is possible!

Vivekananda is the Ammunition

S Jaya Sree, of Chennai, alludes to the penetrating nature of the words of a seer of Truth:

When we are immersed in worldly things we cannot recognize the light inside us. When we enter into absolute life (spiritual life) we can find the same light inside us. The guru has to shoot his spiritual power from heart to heart; only then can we recognise that light (God); it is everywhere. ...

In this universe every object has its own light. Only the grades are different. So we have to 'arise and awake' that light inside us with ammunition. Swami Vivekananda's words are like ammunition (bullets) which will shoot out our

### *The Conundrum*

*Someone left a light on upstairs.  
Someone went up to turn it off and never  
came back, but the light was brighter.  
Someone followed him with his sorrow,  
and came back empty-handed.  
Someone wanted to lose her sorrow, too,  
but didn't trust it enough to let it out  
of her sight.  
Someone kept searching the dark for the  
light.  
Someone tried to shoot out the light, but  
the ammunition was light, too.  
Someone thought she would recognize  
someone else when the light was  
right, but it already was.  
Someone was selling the idea of light,  
but the light wasn't included.  
Some people went to change the light,  
but trying to get to it changed them.  
Someone claimed to be the light, but the  
light only winked when he died.*



ignorance and awaken the light.

### The Great Guru

Asankha, of Chigago, writes a story suggested by the poem:

In a particular village, word spread that a great spiritual guru had come and had made his temporary shelter on a hilltop. The 'light on upstairs' refers to this visiting guru.

As word spread about the visiting guru and his great wisdom, people became curious and started visiting him to find out more about it.

A senior student from one of the ashramas of the village felt a little egotistical. He thought of challenging the visiting guru's knowledge. However, when he met that guru and talked to him he realized that the guru's light was brighter, that he could learn a lot from that guru; he thus decided to stay with the guru.

Another student went to the hilltop and met with the guru and his fellow student. However, he didn't want to stay with the guru and the first student, so he came back without gaining any further knowledge from the guru.

Another person thought of asking for the guru's help to dispel her sorrow. However, she didn't trust enough and dropped the idea.

There was one person who started preparing his ignorant queries to get understanding from the great guru.

One very knowledgeable person had full faith in the teachings of his own guru and thought of challenging the visiting guru. However, after meeting the guru he recognized that it was his own guru from whom he had acquired spiritual wisdom long back. Thus, 'light' here refers to the spiritual wisdom of a guru and 'ammunition' refers to the same spiritual wisdom of an initiated disciple of that guru. And hence the ammunition is nothing but the same light.

Another person guessed the visiting guru to be one of the great gurus she had heard about, but her guess was not right. However, she realized that the visiting guru was no less than the ones she had thought him to be.

As the main topic of conversation was spiri-

tuality in those days, a person who thought himself to be a great guru started selling his own knowledge of spirituality; but he spoke nothing close to actual wisdom.

Some gurus, out of their egotism, thought of showing the visiting guru that they knew much more than he. But when they held discussions with the visiting guru, they ended up learning a great deal from him.

The last person falsely claimed that his knowledge was equal to that of the visiting guru. The latter just shirked the false claim and the accusing person left crestfallen.

### Vedanta

Hemant Vishnu Potdar, of Wai, makes a line-by-line Vedantic analysis:

1. Sages, who realized the Atman, put it forward as the supreme goal of human life. Light is Atman (or Brahman).

2. Buddha discarded the Vedic conceptions. He attained nirvana and thus never came back to be reborn. But later Shankara gave a brighter form to Vedanta.

3. Not all who follow the path get success in this very life.

4. Some people also want humanity to go beyond sorrow, but don't trust enough the goal of liberation (by which the world disappears forever) to be able to attain it.

5. Unwise people go for the unreal (non-Atman) in order to get the Real (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss or Atman).

6. 'Contact is possible between two things of the same species.' In the case of Atman, there is nothing but the Atman itself of its own species. So, if someone has 'to shoot out' (realize) the Atman, he or she will have to use the Atman as the means or 'ammunition'. Atman can be realized only by the grace of the Atman. It can also mean that Atman can be realized only by the Atman itself.

7. Some people think that humanity, when it has progressed 'sufficiently', would recognize an ultimate goal which is other than liberation. But the progress in this regard has already



reached its final stage which has given the message 'Thou art That'.

8. Some people try to express the idea of Atman in words and thought. But the Atman always remains out of reach such attempts. As Shankara says, 'The word Atman and the concept Atman don't touch the Atman'.

9. The Atman is said to be very 'corrosive'. Though Atman is changeless, a permanent change takes place in the one who knows It, as is said in the Upanishads, 'The knower of Brahman becomes Brahman'.

10. People having body-consciousness behave as if their bodies are as permanent as the Atman. Such people, when they die, get another body through which the Atman functions again.

### The Hiranyagarbha

B K Mittal and Prabha Mittal of Rishikesh, analyse the poem in this way:

1. When an enlightened soul leaves the body, he is fully conscious and leaves a mark in the shape of light on the Cosmic Mind—Hiranyagarbha.

2. Those who follow the path as shown by the enlightened soul also do not come back, as they join the same light of consciousness; they turn it brighter because it is now more than one.

3. Those who follow the light along with their troubles, immersed in sorrow, do not reach the goal and so come back empty-handed, as they remain in the fetters of birth and death.

4. For those who follow to get rid of their sorrow or troubles, yet whose trust is not enough to ensure release, the light remains out of sight.

5. The Atman is known by the Atman itself—so declare the Upanishads: and this is Grace. And so they keep searching in the dark for the light of consciousness.

6. Shooting out the light is obtaining a glimpse of That—the pure consciousness—and represents those who have followed the right course. Having a glimpse of That, they realize that the ammunition—the light they

### Enlightened Living

From ancient times human beings have been enlightened through divine powers consequent upon their strong and determined wills. Success was secured after many tests of faith and this has created an immortal destiny for future generations.

Remember Dhruva; he was slighted by his step-mother, performed tapasya, and was guided by Narada to enlightenment. God blessed him to be the pole star, *dhruva nakshatra*. Saints like Tulsidas, Kabirdas, Surdas, Mahatma Gandhi, and Christ have also enlightened humanity.

In the nineteenth century Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa enlightened Narendra, transforming him into Swami Vivekananda for the enlightenment of the world. This was the meeting of truth, faith, and esoterism with intellect and rationalism. Of these two legendary figures one was wrapped in Puranic truth, took even the external forms of religion to be valid and wanted to keep them intact, and was keen on proving all the spiritual practices of ancient India to be true; the other was eager to cut through the dialectics and external bonds of religion. Ramakrishna did not take anything from Narendranath, but yes, he made Vivekananda out of the latter by pouring into him his spiritual power and transcendent vision. One spark is sufficient to light a fire and show the path to enlightenment.

It is interesting that Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad, the reputed freedom fighter and first minister of education in independent India, was an ardent admirer of Sarmad, the naked saint who was beheaded by Aurangzeb. Sarmad's enlightening influence shaped Azad's world-view on the underlying unity of all religions of the world. This is evident in Azad's *Tarjuman-ul-Quran* and *Wahdat-e-din*. It has been pointed out that Sarmad, through his poetry, comes out cleaner and more loyal and true to God than his persecutor: 'O Sarmad, shorten your complaint, of two choices take one; either surren-

der your body to the will of your friend or offer to sacrifice your soul.'

Azad wrote that the path of God in every corner of the world was identical. 'The Holy Quran tells that all the prophets God sent, no matter at what times or in what part of the world, all gave the same lesson: *alamgir qanun-e-sa'adat*, meaning God's universal law of felicity. This law is the worship of God through *amal-e-saleh*, deeds of piety.'

The idea of enlightened living was given to human beings by Bhagavan Shiva. We see the holy Ganga on his head and a snake around his neck. Mother Ganga is the source of life while the serpent is the symbol of death. Similarly, the mouse and the peacock—the *vahanas* (mounts) of Ganesha and Kartika (the children of Shiva) are arch enemies. So are the bull (Nandi) and the lion, the *vahanas* of Shiva and Parvati. But they all coexist peacefully. Believers also say that there is *amrita* (nectar) on Shiva's tongue but *visha* (poison) colours his throat blue. So the mythology of Shiva illustrates a very important truth about life—the coexistence of opposites.

While searching for truth Gandhiji discovered that 'Truth is God' in contradistinction to the ancient wisdom 'God is Truth'. Humans are sparks of life, the sum total of which is God. We may adopt different paths to reach that common goal but these different paths should in no way become reasons to give up our basic unity which is supreme. We must not be like the frog in the well, thinking that our religion alone represent the whole truth, and that all others are false. So, if Sikhs or Hindus deprive themselves of the truths in the Quran and Muslims are unaware of the jewels that lie in the Hindu and Sikh scriptures, they have denied themselves the right to an enriched and enlightened life. While finding our own truth in our own different faiths, worshipping in different shrines, addressing God by different names, we must not allow our differences to take over the basic universal religion of humanity.

—Shiv Dass Kashyap, Bareilly

were using—was the same Consciousness. The knower and the known become one.

7. Some have pre-conceived notions about the light, that it would be different from themselves, and that they would recognize it when it would appear. They fail to do so, because it is the same consciousness—Existence-Knowledge and Bliss that is within them. Who is to recognize whom?

8. Those who try to explain the light—the pure consciousness—are unable to do so, as it is inexpressible and unexplainable: so light was not included in any explanation.

9. Those who went with the idea of changing the light, they came back changed. Those who follow the search for Truth—the light—normally find that they have changed themselves, as their perspective of things is transformed.

10. Those who claim that they have known the Truth, the light, have not known it either, because once you know, you don't come back—this is the state of *nirvikalpa samadhi*. So at the time of death the light only winks and the claimant leaves the body without leaving any trace. The person ends up in *Hiranyagarbha*, perhaps to manifest again at proper time.

### The Light of Knowledge

T A Menon, of South Kalamassery, makes the following analysis:

The Light is so bright that I could interpret It in only one way. Light indeed is *chit*—awareness—the light of knowledge—Self. The sixth line brings out the universality and absolute nature of the Self as the only Reality. As *sat*, the Reality (or Existence), is also *chit*, the light of knowledge or awareness; even an idea of negating it can be only through that awareness itself. The existence of the Self being a precondition for any idea whatsoever, the idea of negation is itself absurd—a *reductio ad absurdum*.

1. The Self is self-effulgent (*svayamprakash*) and beginningless (*anadi*), and has no creator. 'Someone' indicates the unknowable nature of its origin and 'upstairs' is figurative.

2. The rishi explored the Self and merged with it, and faith in Self became more eloquent.

3. One distressed submitted to the rishi implicitly and was liberated.

4. No moksha without vairagya. One cannot be liberated without detachment from the material world.

5. Self is elusive to the mind that seeks it outwardly.

6. Even the thought to negate the Self only reaffirms the Self, for the thought is in awareness which is the Self itself.

7. The ego seeks the Self as distinct from itself, like a subject seeking an object, but the non-dual Self is eternal and unchanging, supporting the ego itself.

8. The Self is unqualified, indescribable, and universally present in all, and is beyond selling and buying (krayavikrayatitam).

9. The rationalists (yuktivadins) tried to disprove the Self, but yukti (reason) is derived from the Self; by applying it properly one will realize the Self.

10. The ego thought that it is the Self; but never realized that it was itself an ephemeral manifestation of the eternal and universal Self.

### What Did the Author Mean?

We may well wonder what Hiranyagarbha, the author of the poem, had in mind when he wrote it. Well, we asked him to tell us about it. He protested, humourously, that a poet cannot divide himself into two and become a commentator on his own poem. Then he capitulated, and offered the following thoughts. His interpretation, though, is no more 'correct' than the others; each person, indeed, will respond in her or his own, unique way, to create meaning for him- or herself.

1. Someone realized the truth.

2. Someone, a scoffer, like maybe St Paul or Jagai, got so close to a saint that they became one. And, in the process, the latter added his own tiny bit of lustre to the Lord.

3. Someone wanted what the saint had, and followed him, his heart full of a burden of sor-

row, and when he came back he was without the sorrow because the saint had taken it away.

4. Another person, seeing the transformation of the previous person, wanted to become transformed as well. So she, too, went to visit the saint, carrying her own burden of sorrow. But, alas! She had become attached to her sorrow, and couldn't let it go. Her ego, you could say, enjoyed having the identity of a victim. So her visit to the saint hadn't yet borne fruit.

5. Another seeker was looking for God in the wrong places. Didn't he know that the light of God shines brightly, and cannot be hidden under a peach basket? He should have been looking where there was more light, instead of under all those peach baskets. In other words, he needed scripture, holy company, and regular sadhana. It wasn't enough to just root around in philosophy, psychology, or theology.

6. Someone was angry at God and tried to harm Him. But the joke was on her, because she was thinking of God and thus she went to God in her thoughts.

7. Here is a seeker who is waiting, as Ramakrishna said, for the waves to die down before taking a dip in the ocean. She is waiting for the right teacher to come along, she is waiting for conditions to be right. But this eternal moment is already perfect for taking up the spiritual life—and since it's eternal, it's the only moment she'll ever have.

8. A man calling himself a guru kept dropping God's name and hinting that he knew Him well. And all you had to do was pay him. The only problem: he was a fake, and God was far away.

9. They wanted to use religion for their own purposes. However, God's brightness illuminated them despite themselves. In other words, they had taken a step towards Her, and She took ten toward them.

10. In other words, no one can claim to be the only way, the only life, the only light. Others have seen God in the past, and others are enjoying the Lord's blessing now. No one has a monopoly on God, the heart of all. ~

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# Religion and Practical Spirituality: Living the Ideal of Highest Humanism

DR SUDIPTA DAS

We must work and constantly do good,  
because it is a blessing to ourselves. That is  
the only way we can become perfect.

—Swami Vivekananda

**R**eligion and practical spirituality are distinctive, yet overlapping pathways to living the ideal of highest humanism. The struggle to adhere to the goal of ideal living in an imperfect world is indeed formidable. Swami Vivekananda once remarked that the world is like a dog's curly tail that can never be made straight. This human intransigence is apparent more than ever today in the relentless acts of unbridled terrorism and cruelty perpetrated person against person. The odds against attaining to ideal living or perfection thus seem almost insurmountable under the present circumstances. Yet, on deeper reflection, the goal of achieving perfection in human life can never be compromised. Why not? Because human beings are embodiments of divinity. As Swami Vivekananda says, 'Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity within.' So the purpose of human life is to become perfect, like God. This divine purpose is primordial and sacred. It is possible that a few positive ripples created by exemplary religious and spiritual action can open the floodgates of moral reform, and bring about a revival of human values. The more we remain cognizant of the practice of religion and spirituality as the axial forces of ideal living, the more will we foster the spread of the moral impulse of humanism, and cause it to prevail in our lives. Only then can the supreme goal of spirituality or perfection in human life become attainable for all as a consummation of the divine will. The realiza-

tion of the principles of the highest humanism or oneness with God is the only way for the redemption of humankind in this turbulent twenty-first century.

## Defining Religion and Spirituality

To begin with, the connection between religion and practical spirituality needs to be identified. Religion may be defined as the instrument through which humanity worships God; religious worship is usually performed in the sanctity of the prayer room in the home, or at the temple. On the other hand, practical spirituality may be defined as the extension of religious worship beyond the boundaries of the prayer room, through work or selfless service to humanity, as a part of daily living. Thus, worship, as an aspect of ideal living, may be a process undertaken through a conjunction of routine religious worship in the home or temple and daily work of any kind, dedicated to God as worship.

Often, religion and spirituality are conceptualized as being synonymous and without significant distinctions. Many consider daily religious worship like prayer, meditation, ceremonial observances, fasting, chanting, singing hymns, or reading scriptures to be expressions of practical spirituality. There is an inclination to believe that one's spirituality is manifested through the practice of religious austerities at home or in the temple. Though the idea that spirituality may radiate out of the prayer room through humanitarian or disinterested services lies dormant in the subconscious or unconscious minds of most religious aspirants, still, one may ask, how many of us actually pursue our daily living with the consciousness that

work is worship? Once we leave the premises of the shrine or temple, our engagements in the jigsaw of worldly activities follow a premeditated path of service to self-bound interests. In a word, we instinctively build an iron wall between the spirit of the prayer room and the spirit of work in the external environment, segregating one from the other as two unrelated phenomena. The visible lower self is divorced from the invisible higher self or spirit by our own conscious actions. But if we were to connect our religious worship with our whole earthly existence, with its plethora of activities, making the latter also worship of God, our struggle to live the ideal of the highest humanism would be considerably eased. To achieve this connection, deep religious introspection and persistent self-evaluation for spiritual stimulation and advancement are essential. Religious contemplation and spiritualized action need to be performed concurrently if we are to make our lives meaningful and ideal.

### From Religion to Spirituality

We learn from our religious scriptures that spirituality is the natural expression of a person's religious convictions. But the twin concepts of religion and spirituality are so deeply intertwined that it may never occur to us how one leads to the other. Or, perhaps many of us conduct our daily religious worship quite mechanically and without any contemplation of our fundamental religious goals. We never really ask ourselves how religion prepares the ground for spirituality. Let us ask ourselves, 'Are we benefitting from our practice of religion, and how? How are we, or are we at all, living our religious ideals? How do we find out if our religious endeavours are meaningful? In what ways can we prove to ourselves that we are making spiritual progress in our lives?'

The practice of religion becomes meaningless if we do not mould ourselves into better human beings and demonstrate our inner transformation through acts of spirituality in our daily life. We must develop an enduring spiri-

tual consciousness, to undergird our worldly undertakings with the principles of ideal living. The goal should be to actually live our religious ideals. Only then can we as human beings transcend from a lower to a higher, and finally to the highest level of humanism; this would be perfectly humane evolution. The steadfast pursuit of truth and selfless love in all our undertakings are goals worth living for, all the more so to countervail the crisis of the spirit endemic in the modern world.

### Myriad Faces of the Divine

The focal point of religion is communion with God. How do human beings conceptualize God? Who is God? God holds a myriad identities. God may be conceived as formless or anthropomorphic, male or female, distinct from humans (dualism) or embedded within humans (non-dualism). Every individual imagines God in the way that will best stimulate that person's inner devotion. Many define God as the Supreme Being and Creator, who loves and cares for each one of His creations. Many Hindu devotees worship God as the Divine Mother. It is the mother who expresses the purest and most natural love for her child, accepting and protecting it in every respect. The child instinctively feels closer to the mother from whose womb it took birth; the umbilical connection lives on long after the cord is physically severed. In accordance with this natural intimacy between mother and child, God is conceptualized as Mother, always loving, forgiving, and sustaining Her children. In a word, the idea of God as Mother engenders a sense of security and strength in the devotee-child.

Though individuals may conceptualize God in myriad ways, God always stands for universal principles such as absolute Truth, Love, Purity, and Perfection. The intent of religious practice is to evoke the same lofty characteristics in men and women, and guide them towards becoming perfect beings. This is possible only when we internalize our spiritual ideal; only then may our worship have any meaning



or impact on our lives. In the words of a religious savant, 'This is why religion is often described as the science of "being and becoming", a science of moral growth, a shaper of character.' Although religion is centred on belief, its validity lies in generating only beliefs that are good and positive, and by its natural merits stimulating good thoughts and good actions in its followers. Thus, shaping good men and good women gives religion its credibility and significance.

True religion guides humanity to uplifting experiences and brings about the miracle of human transformation. It purifies people and reveals their innate divinity. This is accomplished through contemplation, and through service characterized by selflessness, compassion, humility, and moral strength. If religion is practised with devotion it will justify itself by effecting a more humane evolution of humanity. It may not be free of theological disputes regarding the nature of God and the like, but it reveals its potential through its miracles: the transformation of sinners into saints. Valmiki, the author of the Ramayana, is a case in point. A dacoit by profession, he was transformed into a great saint by following the instructions of a celestial sage. Another example is the notorious Angulimala, who wore a necklace made from the fingers of his victims. He intended to make the Buddha his victim, but the Buddha transformed him, and he became a monk and later a saint.

### The Lamp of Our Lives

The practice of religion becomes a commitment to the highest principles of human conduct. It engenders self-discipline and a deep proclivity for adhering to moral principles. A truly religious being strives to acquire these qualities, realizing that God, the Mother, wishes us to cultivate such attributes as part of Her worship. This is religion at its best. It provides the key to the unlocking of one's divinity; it transforms one's character. When one constantly thinks that one is a child of God, one becomes a child of God, pure and unblemished. So

religion may be conceived as the lamp of our lives, guiding us towards the unfoldment of our innate perfection by prescribing moral and spiritual disciplines. Religion offers a moral and spiritual view of life. It impels us to realize our supremacy over self and external surroundings. We must practise religion in such a way that it will shape our lives towards becoming perfect human beings.

### From Lower Truth to Higher Truth

In the life of the lay devotee, religious endeavours normally begin with prayers for the well being of oneself and one's family and kin. Prayer calms the mind and gradually expands one's spiritual horizon to embrace the welfare of all beings, not just of one's earthly kin. So prayers and other related ritualistic observances that are centred on the lower self have the power of gradually cleaning one's inner impurities; transcending them, one is enabled to embrace higher thoughts and exalted patterns of behaviour. One needs to have lesser experiences to transcend them and have greater experiences. In this way, the practice of religious ceremonies comes into play. Their performance is important in religious worship in so far as it helps to discipline the mind and focus it on the deity being worshipped. However, religious savants have cautioned that religious ceremonies must not be performed in excess of their usefulness. In Swami Vivekananda's words, 'It is good to be born in a church, but it is bad to die there.'

Religious parochialism and superstitions engendered through addiction to rituals and ceremonies are detrimental to spiritual life. Such a focus ends in intolerance, self-centeredness, and insensitivity that mutilate religion's intrinsic function of uplifting the human mind and soul. Those congregations that harbour fanaticism or bigotry and seek shelter under the mantle of religion to justify their nihilistic conduct ought to be identified and rejected as spurious institutions denigrating the true purpose of religion. Holy wars waged by religious fundamentalists throughout history are cases in

point. The aim of religion is to mould and unify, not to destroy. Religion strengthens itself not through conflict and anarchy, but through a harmonious confederation of humanistic values aiming for God-realization. Religious fundamentalism and isolationism make people imperfect. Thus, religion can also unmake a person if it is practised in a wrong way.

Religion gives humanity an ideal—the ideal to conquer human imperfections. Religion also endows humanity with the will to live up to that ideal. The human will is moulded through prayer and meditation, which are two vital limbs of religion. They enable one to discover one's real identity. These exercises awaken the pure or higher self—the wellspring of divinity that lies dormant within one's being—and lead us to oneness with God and with all existence. As Swami Lokeswarananda has written, religion is not a declaration of intentions; it is action to fulfil those intentions. If the intrinsic purpose of religion and religious practice is unrecognized, and we continue to cherish self-centredness and indifference toward the rest of the world, we are rendering only lip service to our religious intentions.

The ultimate achievement of dedicated religious practice is spirituality. The concept of spirituality is derived from the existence of the 'spirit', which represents the essence of the human personality, the core of one's being. Spirituality is embodied in the awakening of the Self, the Spirit—that is, the realization of one's spiritual identity. When this happens, the self identifies itself with every living being. The Spirit is primordial; it stands supreme. According to the Bhagavadgita, the body is like a piece of cloth, which is discarded when worn out; it is the Spirit that is permanent, and it uses the body for its own purpose in the way that it chooses. A spiritual aspirant strives to scale the Absolute through moral and spiritual growth.

Spiritual life helps one grow better and stronger till one finds oneself completely free from the fetters of ego that limit one's being. At this stage, one discovers the wellspring of joy ly-

ing deep within oneself that is constant and unaffected by external changes. The Constant, the Eternal, is inlaid in the instant, the temporal. The awareness of the true nature of the Self also reveals the selflessness of the Self, which is but another face of Perfection.

### Life as Divine Communion

Spiritual advancement impels a person to accept life with all its burdens and worship God in all beings and in all things. Herein lies the significance of practical spirituality, which may manifest through daily work dedicated entirely to God. This is the secret of karma yoga. Sri Sarada Devi reminded her disciples that work is an essential part of one's earthly existence. It is through work alone that one can break asunder the bonds of karma; only then will one be free from desires. That is to say, one must first experience bondage before one can overcome it. If we can perceive our daily responsibilities as part of the Divine Will, then we can more easily cultivate detachment towards them and 'work to remove the sufferings of the world.' If one dedicates one's activities to God, there will be no desires or attachment associated with the outcome of the effort.

The Hindu scriptures teach that any kind of work should be performed with detachment to yield the best results. Work as worship is as good as prayer. Hinduism accepts this entire existence as sacred and part of the Divine. If every worldly activity is dedicated to the Supreme Being, whatever one does becomes spiritual. Every dedicated act moves one closer to God. In a similar vein, Ramaprasad idealizes every act as an act of worship to God in his enchanting hymns. Life, then, is actually a long prayer of communion with God. In this regard, Sri Sarada Devi's life stands unparalleled as a model of spirituality lived and not preached. She brought the highest truths of religion and spirituality into daily practice, and her life remained one of long prayer—powerful, penetrating, and silent—that she dedicated to the spiritual well-being of her children.

### Fruits of Practical Spirituality

Practical spirituality is clearly wrought into one's visible nature—in one's behaviour with others, in one's lifestyle, in one's philosophy of life. One can hardly define the parameters of practical spirituality, because its scope and dimensions are so vast. Qualities like humility, selflessness, and moral courage; scintillating acts of dedicated human service; high-minded contemplation in every sphere of existence; and the relentless pursuit of truth are models of practical spirituality. Swami Vivekananda's life is one of the finest examples. He scaled the acme of spirituality and manifested it through his selfless service to his country and the world. Swamiji could not help being what he was, goodness and purity personified. And that indeed is the real nature of spiritual people—that they cannot help being what they are. Veracity, honesty, and innocence become their constant nature. Spiritual people keep growing, and the more they grow in spirit, the more they identify themselves with the welfare of others. They feel the joys and sorrows of others as their own. They help all with reverence and humility, considering it a privilege that they are able to help others. Only such people live the ideal of the highest humanism.

Swami Vivekananda's thoughts were fully centred on humanity. He says, 'The only God to worship is the human soul in the human body.' Again, 'No books, no scriptures, no science can ever imagine the glory of the Self that appears as man, the most glorious God that ever was, the only God that ever existed, exists, or ever will exist.' 'My mission is not Ramakrishna's nor Vedanta's nor anything but simply to bring manhood to this people.' And, 'May I be born again and again, and suffer thousands of miseries so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum total of all souls—and above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species, is the special object of my worship.' He saw God in everyone, poor, rich, good, and evil, and struggled to

arouse people to manifest the perfection embedded within them.

'Expansion is life', says Swamiji. Humans can be their own masters and overcome all difficulties that will come in their path in the process of growing. It is religion which gives people the self-confidence and the will to remain undaunted by all the trials and tribulations in their lives. Strength, courage, and self-confidence—these, according to Swami Vivekananda, constitute the essence of religion; all other things are peripheral. The growth is not physical or material; it is moral and spiritual. According to Swamiji, if there has been one Buddha or Christ, there can be many more. Each soul is potentially divine: a human being is not just a human being, he or she is a god, and must make that divinity manifest through moral and spiritual growth. 'Be like the arrow that darts from the bow and pierces its object', so says Swami Shivananda on the goal of the spiritual aspirant. A spiritual aspirant never wavers from the goal. When the zenith is reached, one becomes 'a circle with its circumference nowhere and centre everywhere'. Therefore, we may identify humanism as the exclusive and highest prerogative of humans. There can be no other perspective.

### 'Not Me, Thou'

Sri Ramakrishna also beckons humanity to aspire for the highest human end. What is this highest human end? According to Sri Ramakrishna, it is God-realization. God-realization is an experience which completely changes an individual. One becomes identified with the cosmos, the whole, the infinite, all and everything. In Sri Ramakrishna's discourse, the experience is like that of the river that loses its identity as it flows into the sea, and becomes the sea—that is to say, one becomes one with others, with everyone and everything, 'from the Supreme Being to the tiny blade of grass'. This realization prevents any isolated identification of the self. The small self with the ego of 'I' and 'mine' is false; the higher Self which is one with everyone is paramount. Sri Ramakrishna was the epit-

ome of the highest humanism. What a disciple said of Christ parallels Sri Ramakrishna's life: 'In him was life; and the life was the light of men.' He was holiness personified, and he chose the purest path of worship, rendering his child-like love to his Divine Mother in his search for God-realization and perfection.

How do we define perfection? Swami Lokeshwarananda has explained perfection as 'Not me, Thou', which is the feeling of oneness with all existence. The ancient seers contended that perfection comes when one sees that there is a common thread running through existence, however diverse it might appear. When one sees this unity of existence, one cannot hate or fight others. One can only love, help, and serve, and find real happiness in humanistic living. The point here is that religious striving should stimulate the awareness of 'Not me, Thou', which is the key to self-conquest and perfection. Buddha, Christ, Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda, and other spiritual giants illumine the pages of religious history as God-men and -women, as models of perfection. Their humanity was constant and infinite. In particular, Ramakrishna and Sarada Devi's lives have taught us that happiness depends on 'being' and not on 'having'. The beauty and love that was intrinsic to their selflessness radiated outward to sanctify the lives of others. 'Not me, Thou' stands as a sacred mantra for human redemption.

### Actualizing the Human Paradise

The greatest problem in the present age is human relationship. Our relationships are mutilated by suspicion, jealousy, indifference, anger, and hatred. Humanity is demented by its own restlessness and ego, as well as ignorance of the purpose of its existence. The Gita says, 'Man is his own friend as well as his foe.' Therefore, under the canopy of religion, we should strive to rise above the mundane world of self-centred relationships to the highest spiritual level through good thoughts and good

work. We know that there is no shortcut to perfection; one has to struggle down an almost endless path to achieve it. Political and social legislation cannot reform one from the inside. One's inner transformation has to emerge through years of spiritual struggle. Though humanity has taken great strides in conquering its natural environment as a pragmatic end, its real task towards conquering the inner self and its insatiable desires has been strangely overlooked. The conquest within ought to be the ideal and the goal, as well as one's priority, however insuperable the task may seem. And hard work is the only way to achieve perfection.

Thus, in the final analysis, religion reflects its glory through practical spirituality. Religion sustains the moral fibre of society, and religious striving propels humanity towards the manifestation of its divinity through acts of practical spirituality in daily living. Religion and spirituality mirror and reinforce one another. In short, religious practice breeds spirituality in an individual. A person who adheres to truth and morality as his or her constant goal becomes endowed with a new kind of dignity that no level of material success, scholarship, or professional attainment can give. Thus, our worship ought to be channelled through prayer, ritual, and contemplation to sharing and caring in our daily lives in truthful, selfless, and compassionate ways. We can actualize our paradise right here on earth through our acts of practical spirituality. Religious ideals need to be internalized through the practice of daily religious worship and then applied to daily living as spiritual actions. This is the highest humanism. There is, therefore, a compelling need for spawning sweeping religious and spiritual enthusiasm that will spread religious ideals like an epidemic and help navigate humanity towards this ideal of highest humanism. The facade of the human ego has to be eternally purged to bring the selfless spirit alive and to consciousness. Living the ideal of highest humanism is the essential aim of human life.

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# Karma Yoga at the End of the World

PRITHA LAL

I must admit, the title of this article doesn't suit me, because I cannot claim to have any credible understanding of the famous scriptural doctrine of karma yoga. The concept of doing one's duty and not expecting anything back seems to me to be a statement oft-repeated, yet seldom truly understood.

Today I decided to stay up late and watch the famous documentary *March of the Penguins*. To watch these amazing creatures, almost comical in their mannerisms, survive nature at her harshest is both educational and somehow spiritual.

It was fascinating, tragic, and overwhelming to see the mother and the father of an unborn penguin take turns walking seventy miles from the nesting ground to the sea, to return with food for the mate and their child. It was heartening to watch the families huddle together in this frigid terrain and climate as individual parents went in search of food. The guttural sounds and cries of these funny animals sounded almost human as they searched out their families in the huge herd.

The parents went back and forth, one of them shielding all the while, first the egg, and then the new born chick, from cold winter storms, predatory birds, and other hostile members of their race. A few of the chicks never made it, but those that did, grew up with a warmth that is unimaginable in a place like Antarctica. They took their baby steps as they came out into the light from within the secure shelter of their parents' brood patches.

All through the nine long months of harsh

winter, each parent went without food for several months at a stretch so that they could incubate the eggs and protect their little ones. In spite of dire starvation, they made their march to the sea so that they could bring food back to their young in the nesting area. And yet, it was the conclusion of this documentary that left me in awe.

After ensuring that the little chick was secure to face the world on its own, this family of mother, father, and child parted ways, never to see each other again. The father and mother, who put their lives at risk to protect the 'apple of their eye', plunged into the ocean without so much as a backward glance. It was almost as though they had done their duty with every

honesty and diligence conceivable in nature, and it was now their turn to return to where they came from. The little chicks stood along the ocean shore watching helplessly. But not for long—after some time they too took the plunge into the icy waters to continue the cycle that has gone on for thousands of years.

I wonder if we as humans are capable of this kind of diligence and detachment. Nature is said to be the greatest teacher. This documentary showed me today what the Gita has said, so eloquently, about the concept of selfless duty. Maybe the romantic nature of my soul makes me look for metaphors where they don't really exist. But today, for me, these amazing creatures were more than a National Geographic wonder; they taught me one of the most difficult concepts in our scriptures, with a simplicity which was as beguiling as it was poignant. ~







## Reviews



For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA  
publishers need to send two copies of their latest publications.

**Vivekananda: Lessons in Classical Yoga.** Comp. and ed. Dave DeLuca. Namaste Books, 26861 Trabuco Road, Suite E 55, Mission Viejo, CA 92691-3593, USA. Website: [www.namastebooks.com](http://www.namastebooks.com). 2003. 290 pp. \$19.95.

Swami Vivekananda, admired as the 'cyclonic monk' and as architect of modern India, is a perpetual inspiration. He had observed, 'I shall inspire men everywhere until the world shall know that it is one with God.' True to his statement, countless individuals—secular and spiritual leaders as well as ordinary people—and institutions have benefited from his teachings. Swamiji's lectures on India's ancient wisdom, often laced with a keen sense of humour, are therefore always in demand.

The book under review has selections from Swamiji's teachings on yoga. The compiler has refrained from offering his views or comments, thus allowing Swamiji's lessons to reach the reader in their pristine purity.

Swami Vivekananda opened the floodgates of Vedanta and Yoga for Western audiences. He was 'human eloquence at its highest pitch' while expounding the yoga system, and had a profound impact in America and Europe. It was a revelation to many when he called upon people of different faiths to help each other and not quarrel, pointing out that 'each human being stands for the divine'.

Swamiji explained that to a Hindu, religion means realization, not mere beliefs in dogmas or rituals. The goal is to 'become divine, to reach God', and see God everywhere, and become one with universal Consciousness. God is not to be feared or appeased. For we are one with the 'Infinite Existence, Knowledge and Bliss'; birth, life, and death are only manifestations of this oneness. Human beings do not progress from error to truth but from lower levels of truth to higher levels.

Some of these concepts have been covered in the first section of the book, 'Oneness'. This is followed by chapters on 'Classical Yoga' as a pathway to one-

ness. The four major yoga systems (jnana, karma, bhakti, and raja yoga) are dealt with in the subsequent sections.

We weave our own destiny or fate. Therefore we are responsible for being what we are. No power can stop our actions from yielding results, good or bad. No one is a sinner; a sinner is one who sees a sinner in another. One should not decry rituals and mythology. Those who rose to great heights in spirituality have come 'through the discipline of rituals'. Bhakti yoga teaches that 'wherever the heart expands, He is there manifested'.

Swamiji foresaw the consequences of an emerging consumerism and market-driven economy. As a result of overemphasizing the intellect, 'artificial wants have been created; and every poor man, whether he has money or not, desires to have those wants satisfied, and when he cannot, he struggles, and dies in the struggle. ... If all this vast amount of effort had been spent in making men purer, gentler, more forbearing, this world would have a thousand-fold more happiness than it has today.' One need not search for a more severe warning against the mindless greed for consumer goods.

The section on raja yoga mentions the eight-fold path ending in samadhi. One must remember Swamiji's caution that raja yoga and related techniques are best learnt by sincere practice under an able guide; no amount of lectures alone will reveal the truth. There are various yoga systems; each aspirant should develop in the way that suits him or her best.

Each section in the book accommodates numerous topics, and in the process ideas are repeated. Some of this repetition could have been avoided. The book concludes with two appendices: one about the World Parliament of Religions of 1893 and the other a biography of Swami Vivekananda. These are useful additions for the benefit of those unfamiliar with the life of this great yogi from India. An introduction or prefatory note and notes on difficult philosophical terms and issues would have added to the value of the book.

Swami Vivekananda's speeches and writings

form an encyclopedia on Vedanta and Yoga. They expose the limitations of a secular way of life and point to the inevitable need for spiritual values. Sister Christine has recorded how despair and hopelessness turned into a feeling of bliss after listening to Swamiji. One never feels jaded reading Swami Vivekananda. Dave DeLuca's anthology is a welcome addition to Vivekananda literature and a useful guide to spiritual life.

P S Sundaram  
Mumbai

**L**ife, Mind and Consciousness. The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Kolkata 700 029. E-mail: rmic@vsnl.com. 2004. xiv + 519 pp. Rs 75.

**T**his book comprises the proceedings of a seminar held at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata, from 16 to 18 January 2004. This was a sequel to a previous seminar on 'An Exploratory Approach to Consciousness' held at the same institution in February 2002. The seminar had eight academic sessions in which eighteen papers were presented. Apart from the text of these papers and addresses in the inaugural and concluding sessions, the volume also contains a record of the discussions on individual presentations and a final panel discussion.

The subject of the seminar is highly topical and has been debated in several similar seminars and conferences around the world. One of the bugbears of any discussion on consciousness is the lack of a proper definition of the word accepted by all disciplines. The outcome of such conferences has always been a polite statement: 'Let us agree to disagree'. The present seminar is no exception. It concludes with the observation: 'It is wonderful to deal with Consciousness but it would be wrong to accept that we have understood it.'

The participants in this seminar come from different disciplines. There seems to be a heavier emphasis on philosophy and physical science than on the biological sciences. Philosophers, especially of the Indian schools, have a very clear idea of consciousness, thanks to the Upanishads. Physicists are still trying to grapple with the Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen paradox. Neuroanatomists, on the other hand, are trying to locate consciousness in the intricate networks of the brain. There still does not appear to be any meeting ground where all of them could

come to a common conclusion. Philosophers and scientists appear like two independent teams trying to dig a tunnel through a mountain, but from opposite sides. It is only when there is a common meeting ground that discussions become meaningful.

It is rather surprising that the only sensible approach to the problem of consciousness which can bring the two groups together has hardly been touched upon. This is the concept of a 'Spectrum of Consciousness' suggested by Ken Wilber. A passing reference has been made to the different interpretations of consciousness in some of the papers and discussions, but the details have not been discussed.

This does not mean that such seminars do not serve any purpose. At least they bring experts from several disciplines onto the same platform, and allow for a sharing of experience and insight. One needs to continue digging this tunnel from both ends until, some day, the two ends hopefully meet.

The proceedings have been brought out in an attractive format which makes for easy reading. Unfortunately the editing is of a rather poor quality. This is more so in the case of the panel discussions as well as the discussions on individual presentations. It is likely that the sessions were recorded on tape and then transcribed. If so, the transcription leaves a lot to be desired. It is hoped that, at least in the next edition, the discussions will be properly reported, because it is these discussions that always form the most important part of any seminar.

The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture deserves to be thanked for organizing seminars on such topics from time to time. We look forward to more such seminars in future.

Dr N V C Swamy  
Dean of Academic Programmes  
Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthana  
Bangalore

**T**heravāda Buddhist Devotionalism in Ceylon, Burma and Thailand. V V S Saibaba. D K Printworld, Sri Kunj, F-52, Bali Nagar, New Delhi 110 015. E-mail: dkprintworld@vsnl.net. xvi + 88 pp. Rs 200.

**T**he work under review studies devotionalism, bhakti, in the context of Theravada Buddhism. All students of Buddhism know that the Buddhists, whatever school they may belong to, do not attach any importance to God or an ultimate

Reality in respect of spiritual practices. Later Buddhist philosophers even deny the existence of God. Therefore bhakti as taught by Narada or Shandilya, or the Gita and the Bhagavata, has no relevance to Buddhist thought or practices. But Swami Vivekananda has rightly pointed out that no religion can totally discard the worship of symbols; therefore, the practice of bhakti in some form or other is universal.

Bhakti did play a role in Buddhist traditions since very early times. It is probable that bhakti first entered the Buddhist fold through the Mahasanghikas, a sect of which school was known as the Lokottaravadins. The Lokottaravadins accepted the Buddha as a lokottara purusha, a superhuman being, and they therefore propagated the veneration of the Buddha in stupas and various other symbols. Images of Gautama Buddha started being sculptured as early as the first century BCE. With the rise of Mahayana, devotionism was conceptualized more formally and full-fledged rituals were formulated and put into practice. Vajrayana or Tantric Buddhism developed out of Mahayana and marked the culmination of devotionism. Many Bodhisattvas and deities—both gods and goddesses—were conceived and their images sculpted. They were worshipped with elaborate rituals. This practice is still current in Nepal and Tibet.

It is generally believed that devotionism in Buddhism is an affair of Mahayana-Vajrayana, and that Theravada (the southern version of Sthaviravada) has no devotional element in it. This notion is not correct. The Buddha was being worshipped in symbols like replicas of the Bodhi tree, footprints, and chaityas and stupas which were supposed to contain relics of Buddha's mortal remains. This practice was prevalent long before the time of Emperor Ashoka, who gave state recognition to Sthaviravada. He constructed several thousand stupas all over his empire and went out on pilgrimage to the holy places which were associated with the memory of the Buddha. When Theravada Buddhism was introduced into Ceylon (Sri Lanka of today) and therefrom into Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos, the devotional aspect of Buddhism gained ground—was locally developed and adapted to local cultures.

Dr V V S Saibaba of Andhra University has brought out this less-known aspect of Theravada Buddhism as practised in three countries: Ceylon, Burma, and Thailand. He has dealt with his subject

from historical and canonical perspectives as well as from direct observation. His study shows how the rigidity of monasticism had to be partially relaxed to accommodate devotional worship, particularly among the laity, which made Buddhism more appealing to wider masses.

The text is divided into two parts: Historical perspective of Theravada Buddhist Devotionalism, and Theravada Buddhist Devotionalism in Ceylon, Burma, and Thailand. Each part is again divided into four chapters. The second part is descriptive; the analytical first part is the more important. It traces the history of the worship of chaityas, stupas, relics such as hair, nail, tooth, and ashes of the Buddha, symbols, and finally of images, on the basis of Pali canonical texts. In this part the learned author has displayed a mastery over Pali canonical literature that makes this work commendable and a valuable addition to Buddhist studies.

In conclusion, it will not be out of place if a few shortcomings of the work are pointed out for future emendation. In quite a few places Pali and Sanskrit terminology have been mixed up. While discussing Buddhist devotionism in Thailand, the author has overlooked an interesting feature of Thai Buddhist practices. The Thai Buddhists worship, with great veneration, a few Hindu deities, such as Brahma, Ganesha, Vishnu, and Dharani (the earth goddess). Rama is highly venerated in Thailand, to the extent that all the monarchs of the present ruling dynasty are titled Rama, the present monarch being titled Rama IX. Let me also point out a glaring lapse: the author writes: 'Aśoka confined himself to the practical side of religion, for his inscriptions reproduce the teachings of the Pāli canonical work *Vimānavatthu*' (7). This is an impossible proposition, because no Pali canonical work was recorded before or during Ashoka's time. According to the Mahavamsa the entire Pali canon was written down, for the first time, in Sri Lanka during the reign of Vattagamani Abhaya, in the first century BCE. In all probability, even the Pali language was not developed during Ashoka's reign.

In spite of the few shortcomings mentioned above, Dr Saibaba's work deserves sincere appreciation. Any student of Buddhist studies may read it with pleasure and profit.

Dr Satkari Mukhopadhyaya

Former Coordinator, Kalakoua Division  
Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts  
New Delhi

The Way To Supreme Bliss. Trans. Samvid. Samata Books, 10 Congress Building, 573 Mount Road, Chennai 600 006. E-mail: samatabooks@yahoo.co.in. 2005. 118 pp. Rs 90.

The Way to Supreme Bliss is a translation of the twenty-fourth chapter of the Paramananda Tantra, an important Tantric work. It synthesizes, as do all major Tantric works, the traditions of Yoga and Vedanta with the ritualistic aspect of religion. The rituals in this context come from the Shakta tradition of Sri Vidya.

The twenty-fourth Ullasa of the Paramananda Tantra, called adhyatma kathana, focusses on purely spiritual and philosophical matters. It gives a full account of the knowledge that liberates the sadhaka. The work starts with a discussion of the threefold ignorance: anava-mala, mayiya-mala and karma-mala; as also the viveka, discrimination or self-enquiry, that needs to be practised in order to rid oneself of it. The term anava is derived from anu (atom) and the associated mala (impurity) is due to the limitation pertaining to the individualized consciousness of the jiva. Mayiya-mala is the limitation due to maya and delusion bringing about a sense of difference from the world. Finally, karma-mala is associated with works. The discrimination or self-enquiry that asserts one's true nature as pure Consciousness eradicates these three and establishes the jiva in its pure pristine state.

The text next deals with the progressive states attained by a sadhaka as he or she sheds these limitations. Associated spiritual practices and traditions, particularly those of Karma, Yoga, and Vedanta, are discussed as means of progress.

Verses 48-57 echo Chapter Thirteen of the Bhagavadgita and discuss what comprises jnana (knowledge), jneya (the knowable) and vijnana (special knowledge). This is reiterated in a slightly different form in verses 69-77, where the unity of the world in Consciousness is stressed. In a sense verses 56-80 deal with the path of knowledge while the subsequent verses trace the paths of yoga and karma.

An important spiritual practice emphasized in this context is svadhyaya, listening repeatedly to the words of the guru and the scriptures. The link between Yoga and Vedanta is discussed subsequently in the garb of the relation between mind and consciousness. Their approach being synthetic, the Tantras try to absorb the methods of controlling the

mind from Yoga, and the methods of self-enquiry and cultivation of brahma-buddhi (Brahman consciousness) from Vedanta. Spiritual practices are recommended for sadhakas of different categories: jnana for the best, yoga for the next group, and karma for the third. In this way, even rituals find a legitimate place in the scheme of things. Japa or repetition of a mantra, one of the principal practices in Tantra, is a spiritual practice that derives its philosophical content from all three traditions. Meditation leading to samadhi is given its rightful place.

The lucid translation by Samvid of this important Tantric work brings out the synthetic approach of the Tantras. It would be of help to sadhakas wishing to adopt one or more of the paths of jnana, yoga, or karma as a means of spiritual evolution.

Br. Brahmachaitanya  
Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira  
Kolkata

### Books Received

Between East and West. Luce Irigaray. New Age Books, A 44 Naraina Phase I, New Delhi 110 028. E-mail: nab@vsnl.com. 2005. xiv + 147 pp. Rs 125.

The women's movement in India, taking its cue from feminists across the globe, has largely been concerned with addressing socio-cultural, legal, and political issues, often overlooking the very fundamental spiritual dimension of the woman it wishes to empower. Luce Irigaray, a leading French feminist, argues incisively that the spiritual dimension can be ignored only at the risk of losing the very soul of the feminine. And Irigaray is not arguing for any vague transcendental metaphysics, but for spirituality rooted in the breath and the body. Important food for thought for feminist thinkers.

Sannyasa and Women. Mata Yoganandamayī and Mata Vivekamayī. Sri Bhavatarini Ashrama, 282 Saraswathinagar, Vijayanagar, Bangalore 560 040. 2005. x + 74 pp. Rs 10.

A brief review of the monastic tradition grounded in the life and teachings of Sri Sarada Devi. Not only is this tradition uniquely empowering for women, it also works for a community that grants primacy to women and their aspirations.

## Reports

### RKMVERI Convocation

The first convocation of the Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Educational Research Institute (RKMVERI) was held at the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore, on 2 September 2006. The RKMVERI was conferred deemed university status by the Government of India in January 2005 under the University Grants Commission (UGC) Act. Unlike conventional universities, RKMVERI focuses on community-development-oriented studies such as disability management, rural development, and tribal development, with value education as an integral part of all courses. RKMVERI commenced its first Faculty of Disability Management and Special Education at the International Human Resource Development Centre for the Disabled (IHRDC) at the Vidyalaya campus in July 2005.

At the convocation, degrees were conferred on eighty-eight scholars of the Diploma, BEd, and MEd special education courses by Swami Smarananandaji, Chancellor, RKMVERI and General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. Swami Smarananandaji also addressed the convocation, as did Swami Suhitanandaji, Pro-Chancellor, and Swami Atmapriyanandaji, Vice-Chancellor. Prof. Moolchand Sharma, Vice-Chairman, University Grants Commission, Government of India, delivered the Convocation Address and highlighted the need for offering dedicated services to raise the status of downtrodden sections of society. He stressed that the UGC is proud to be associated with RKMVERI, and handed over the Commission's letter of sanction for a grant of Rs 4 crore for the infrastructural development of the university.

RKMVERI, with its headquarters at Belur



*Swami Smarananandaji hands a degree to a scholar*

Math, uses facilities available at Ramakrishna Mission centres all over the country, demonstrating the concept of a deemed university with multiple campuses. It has plans to launch programmes in other countries too in course of time.

The UGC has approved three additional faculty centres for RKMVERI; courses are being started at these centres from the current academic session as noted: (1) Loka Shiksha Parishad, **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur**, for the Faculty of Integrated Rural Development and Management (IRDM); two-year MSc in IRDM and one-year postgraduate diploma in Agro-based Biotechnology. (2) Divyayan Krishi Vigyan Kendra, **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Morabadi, Ranchi**, for the Faculty of Integrated Rural and Tribal Development (IRTD); five-year integrated MSc course in IRTD and one-year post-graduate diploma in Agro-based Biotechnology. (3) Vivekananda Research Centre at **Ramakrishna Mission Swami Vivekananda's Ancestral House and Cultural Centre, Kolkata**, for doctoral and post-doctoral research; doctoral programmes in Mathematical Sciences, Philosophy, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Thought, Consciousness Studies, and related disciplines.

### Achievement

Dr C S Radhakrishnan, a teacher in the





Dr Kostyuchenko, with Swami Prabhananda and Sri Kanwal Sibal

Department of Sanskrit, Vivekananda College, **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Chennai**, has been elected a member of the Consultative Committee of the International Association of Sanskrit Studies, Paris.

### Vivekananda Award

Dr Vladislav Sergeyevich Kostyuchenko, former professor of philosophy in the History of Foreign Philosophy department at Moscow State University and one of the foremost experts on Indian philosophy in Russia, received the 2006 Vivekananda Award from the **Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture** on 6 August 2006 at a simple ceremony held at the Indian embassy in Moscow, for his lifelong work furthering the understanding and appreciation of Indian philosophy and the teachings of Swami Vivekananda in Russia and the former Soviet Union. Dr Kostyuchenko has many books in Russian to his credit, including *Integral Vedanta*, *Vivekananda*, *Classical Vedanta* and *Neo Ved-*

*anta*, and *Sri Aurobindo: Multiplicity of Heritage and Unity of Thought*, published in 1970, 1977, 1984, and 1998 respectively. The prize, comprising a citation, a book and photograph of Swami Vivekananda, and Rs 1 lakh cash, was handed over to Dr Kostyuchenko by Sri Kanwal Sibal, Indian ambassador to Russia, in the presence of Swami Prabhananda, Secretary of the Institute. Dr Kostyuchenko was born in 1934.

### World Premiere

*The Passion of Ramakrishna*, an opera by internationally acclaimed composer Philip Glass, with libretto by Kusumita Pedersen, premiered on 16 September 2006 at the Orange County Performing Arts Center, Costa Mesa. It was performed by the Pacific Symphony, the Pacific Chorale, and soloists; Carl St Clair conducted. The work was co-commissioned by the Pacific Symphony and the Nashville Symphony. It consists of six parts: Prologue, The Master's Vi-



Composer Philip Glass with Swamis Atmarupananda and Ishtananda

sions, Sarada Devi, The Master's Illness, The Mahasamadhi of the Master, and Epilogue. The libretto has been taken mainly from the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, which the composer has been reading for the last forty years. The performance received numerous standing ovations. Writes Mr Glass:

It is hard to imagine the emergence of India on the world stage without the spark that was provided by Ramakrishna's brilliance. Perhaps, some may doubt that India—the most populous democracy of our time, brimming with vitality and creativity—could owe so much to one saintly man, long gone, who lived a life of such utter simplicity. Yet I believe that is exactly the case.

It has been said that when a great man dies, it is as if all of humanity—and the whole world, for that matter—were witnessing a beautiful, timeless sunset. At that moment 'the great matter of life and death' is revealed, if not explained and understood. By bearing witness to that event, perhaps we understand a little better our own mortality, its limits and possibilities. *The Passion of Ramakrishna* is meant to recount, in this highly abbreviated work, his suffering, death and transfiguration as they took place during the last few months of his life.

### Relief

In September heavy rains caused havoc in several parts of West Bengal and Orissa. Ramakrishna Mission centres in these states started relief operations immediately. Centres in Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan continued relief operations among the flood victims there. Relief details are as follows:

**Ramakrishna Mission, Jaipur:** 6,060 blankets and 3,023 tarpaulin tents to 3,064 flood-affected families of 26 panchayats in Barmer and Jaisalmer districts.

**Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot:** 4,236 food packets, 14,828 kg rice and dal, 18,535 kg wheat flour, 1,853 kg edible oil, 1,112 kg spices, 2,706 kg salt, 370 kg tea powder, 3,707 kg sugar, 104 blankets, 3,707 bed-sheets, 3,707 chaddars, 3,707 saris, 2,706 soap-bars, 16,236 candles, and 2,706 matchboxes to flood-af-

fectured people of Ahmedabad, Anand, and Kheda districts.

**Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Mumbai:** 2,263 kg rice, 3,678 kg wheat, 893 kg dal, 85 chaddars, and 75 saris to 998 persons in Buldana district.

**Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Rajahmundry:** 754 blankets; and 377 saris, lungis, mats, and trunks to 377 families of Ainavilli village in East Godavari district; also medical relief to 617 flood victims.

**Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Bhubaneswar:** 6,800 kg chira, 2,800 kg sugar, 2,000 kg salt, 4,000 packets of biscuits, 4,000 matchboxes and 8,076 candles to 10,815 flood-affected persons of 16 villages in Kendrapara district.

**Ramakrishna Math, Puri:** 32,172 kg chira and 2,413 kg sugar to 50,916 persons of 121 villages in Puri district.

**Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Puri:** 16,020 kg chira and 1,602 kg sugar to 21,836 persons of 55 villages in Puri Sadar and Gop blocks of Puri district.

**Ramakrishna Math, Antpur:** 12,500 kg chira and 2,200 kg sugar to flood-affected families of Jaynagar and Balai Chak areas of Khanakul Block II, Hooghly, and Udaynarainpur block, Howrah.

**Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Malda:** cooked food (khichri) to 2,000 persons of Khaskhole village and Chakbandi tribal colony in Malda district.

**Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha, Belur Math:** cooked food (khichri), chira, sugar, milk, and medicines to 12,830 persons of 9 villages of Udaynarainpur area, Howrah.

**Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Sargachhi:** cooked food (khichri) to 2,500 persons of Rangamati, Chandpara, and Satui Chowrigachha gram panchayats.

**Ramakrishna Math, Baranagar:** 195 saris, 50 dhotis, and 109 children's garments, and **Ramakrishna Mission, Batticaloa:** 528 mosquito-nets, to poor and needy people of nearby areas.

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